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OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

May 2001
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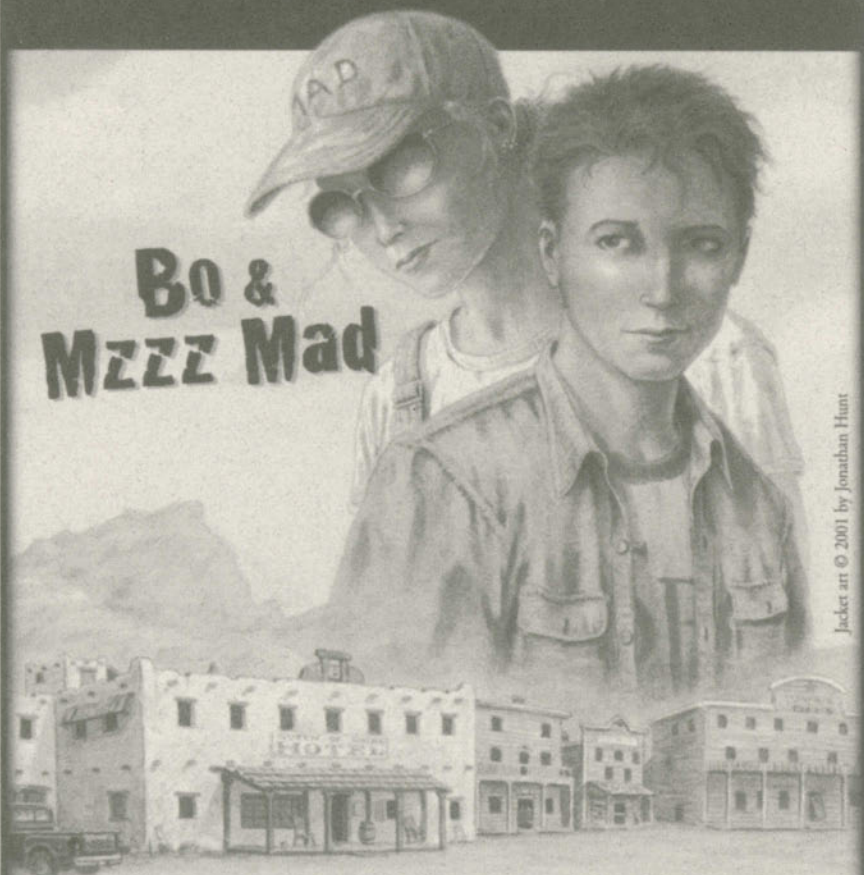


University of Illinois
Graduate School of Library and Information Science

University of Illinois Press

New from Newbery Medalist Sid Fleischman

Bo & Mzzz Mad



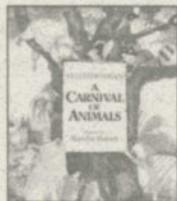
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Bo Gamage and Madeline (Mzzz Mad) Martinka—their families have been feuding for generations. When Bo is orphaned, he suddenly finds himself in a nest of Martinkas out on today's California desert. Are these cousins as all-fired mean as they're reputed to be? Can two greedy outlaws and a missing treasure map actually bring everyone together? Sid Fleischman's rollicking tale shows that even Gamage and Martinkas may be able to help each other chase after their dreams.

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T H E B U L L E T I N

OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS

May 2001
Vol. 54 No. 9



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
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EXPLANATION OF CODE SYMBOLS USED WITH REVIEWS

*	Asterisks denote books of special distinction.
R	Recommended.
Ad	Additional book of acceptable quality for collections needing more material in the area.
M	Marginal book that is so slight in content or has so many weaknesses in style or format that it should be given careful consideration before purchase.
NR	Not recommended.
SpC	Subject matter or treatment will tend to limit the book to specialized collections.
SpR	A book that will have appeal for the unusual reader only. Recommended for the special few who will read it.

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THE BIG PICTURE

True Believer

by Virginia Euwer Wolff

LaVaughn (narrator of *Make Lemonade*, BCCB 7/93) is a committed young woman, determined to break the tradition of her neighborhood and make it to college. She moves up to a fast-track science class, leaving old friends Myrtle and Annie behind, and commits to strict after-school sessions of Grammar Build-Up, taught by the inspiring Dr. Rose and using grammar as a focus for life lessons about standards and determination. Having babysat for young single mother of two Jolly, LaVaughn knows that fifteen is old enough to be diverted from one's life plans by a boy, but she doesn't understand how anyone could be so foolish as to let that happen. And then she finds Jody.

A childhood friend returned to the neighborhood, Jody shares LaVaughn's determination to leave this hard life behind and get to college; he is also so "gorgeous/ I can't look at you and talk to you at the same time." LaVaughn is head-over-heels in love, aching for reciprocity; Jody clearly enjoys LaVaughn's company, assenting to be her date for a school dance, but he's not stepping into the boyfriend role. When she slips into his apartment to deliver surprise cookies, the surprise is on her: "and I recognized Jody but not the other one,/ I only noticed it was a boy./ I stood ice-still and I saw their mouths go together and stay." Devastated at this mammoth blow to her dreams, LaVaughn shuts down in grief ("Everything is tragic./ Why didn't anybody ever tell me that before?") and endangers the rest of her future hopes in consequence.

The disappointment-in-romance plot will resonate with many readers, but that's not what the book is really about. While many YA books, explicitly or implicitly, treat the topic of growth and maturation, few capture it as vividly as this title. LaVaughn's world is riddled with change and newness: in addition to her interest in Jody, her path is diverging from that of Myrtle and Annie, who are finding meaning in a restrictive Christian group while LaVaughn finds it in academic ambition, and her long-widowed mother is dating again. LaVaughn is discovering her capabilities, her strengths, her pride, and she's also discovering their price (her old friends term her "uppity") and their down side (she's thoughtlessly condescending to the unglamorous but nice and devoted boy who's her lab partner). She also discovers genuine despair for the first time in her life, and she begins to realize how much strength living beyond such despair can take—and that she has such strength.

The free-verse text gets much accomplished in few words, making the pages airy and inviting to readers who might be daunted by the page count. The verse blends into the story, seeming natural and unforced, and LaVaughn's narration is eloquent but unmannered. The effect of the verse format is musing, a stream of struggling but insightful consciousness, and through it all shines Wolff's

tenderness towards her characters and the world. LaVaughn is believable but heroic, with a wonder about life large and small that makes her thirst for knowledge and revel in its expansion; her mother is a familial hero of relentless discipline, stern integrity (her boyfriend becomes persona non grata when he suggests borrowing from LaVaughn's college fund for his unpaid phone bills), and an ample supply of love. LaVaughn's partners in Grammar Build-Up self-advancement are an appealing crew, and Patrick, her lab partner, is touching and sympathetic.

The book is firmly grounded in contemporary reality, and many teens will recognize LaVaughn's turmoil ("Dear God, will I ever understand anything?"). For LaVaughn, however, contemporary reality is the source of revelation. Not only is there a world of possibilities, good and bad, there is a world of choices she can make to have power over her own life. "We must make momentous decisions," says Dr. Rose, and LaVaughn realizes that her decisions *are* momentous: she chooses to accept the risk of hoping, to embrace those she loves as they are, and to believe in her future. At her sixteenth birthday, she says, "I think I can live with the way life is." Maybe she'll convince her readers that they can, too. (Imprint information appears on p. 357.)

Deborah Stevenson, Associate Editor



NEW BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

ARMSTRONG, JENNIFER *Thomas Jefferson: Letters from a Philadelphia Bookworm*. Winslow, 2001 117p illus. with photographs (Dear Mr. President)

ISBN 1-890817-30-9 \$8.95

Ad Gr. 4-6

Here debuts yet another historical-fiction series based on the dubious, but now ubiquitous, premise that children of olden times had an insatiable urge to write. Amelia Hornsby, fictional adolescent ward of Dr. Benjamin Rush, meets Meriwether Lewis at Rush's home and immediately doubts the veracity of his claim to be President Jefferson's personal secretary. She goes straight to the best source for confirmation, writing to Jefferson himself, and thus ensues an exchange of letters in which Amelia reports on the events in Philadelphia and Jefferson offers updates on the Corps of Discovery's exploration of the Louisiana Territory and other concerns dear to his heart. The series' pedagogical intent fairly oozes from every page, and it is clumsily underscored by the steady appearance of footers referring readers to the Winslow Press website (without specifics indicating *where* on the site) for still more information. (Woe to the unconnected, or to readers who prefer to peruse novels in an armchair rather than at a computer terminal!) Although the letters' content amounts to little more than textbook data reworked into a chattier format, Amelia has an appealing voice—comically prissy and a trifle arrogant—and she spices her end of the correspondence with allusions to frequent mishaps that the reader will recognize are generally of her own making. This and the

gallery of pictures interspersed throughout may be enough to make the lesson go down easy. EB

ASHMAN, LINDA *Castles, Caves, and Honeycombs*; illus. by Lauren Stringer. Harcourt, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-15-202211-2 \$16.00 R 2-5 yrs

Ashman asserts that "many places make a home" in this rhyming tour of various dwellings. Most of the abodes ("a silky web" for the spider, "a sandy dune" for the crab, etc.) are the homes of animals, presented in a series of unforced couplets describing the range of possible shelters. Each couplet ("A hollow space inside a tree.// A tidal pool beside the sea") is accompanied by an acrylic painting of the "home" and the animals that live therein. Full-page illustrations and the occasional double-page spread feature softly rounded compositions with strong curves and circular images. The paintings are a bit bland and repetitive, but their realistic style and cozily reassuring sense of animal and human community combine with the low-key, descriptive text to make this a simple science lesson that will be appreciated for its brevity and clean, easy-to-see illustrations. JMD

AVI *Don't You Know There's a War On?* HarperCollins, 2001 [208p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029214-8 \$15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-380-97863-6 \$15.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 5-8

At the ripe old age of sixteen, narrator Howie Crispers looks back to 1943 when he was a naïve Brooklyn youth of ten and in love (or at least deeply in like) with his teacher, Miss Gossim. Howie accidentally overhears the school principal insist that Miss Gossim be fired, and inspired by wartime talk of spies and heroes, he embarks on his own campaign of espionage to discover the secret that's landed her in hot water (she's pregnant and secretly married) and to rescue her career. Howie's quest proceeds so smoothly that it generates but little tension. Moreover, in casting Howie as a sixteen-year-old (circa 1949), Avi introduces the nagging problem of why the narrator needs to apprise his hypothetical audience of wartime details they should already know. Still, homefront activities are intriguing, Howie's a character with considerable warmth and heart, and Miss Gossim's every fifth grader's dream teacher—humorous, patient, compassionate, and fair (not to mention beautiful and blonde). Pair this with Bunting's *Spying on Miss Müller* (BCCB 3/95) for different takes on homefront espionage. EB

AVI *Prairie School*; illus. by Bill Farnsworth. HarperCollins, 2001 48p (I Can Read Chapter Books)
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-027665-7 \$14.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027664-9 \$14.95 Ad Gr. 1-3

Farm work and the great outdoors suit Noah just fine, and he cannot accept that there could be any advantage to book learning for a boy growing up on the 1880 Colorado frontier. His parents think otherwise, and Aunt Dora arrives from the East with books, chalkboard, and determination to teach Noah to read. At first Noah manages to find plenty of excuses ("I forgot to feed the chickens!"; "Got to get that snake!") to ditch his lessons, but his wheelchair-using aunt out-strategizes him. She follows him around outside, asking him questions about the earth and sky around them, and then reads excerpts from the maligned books that capture

his attention, expand his knowledge, and give him the boost he needs to start reading on his own. There's a shovelful of wishful thinking and a whopping reading-is-good-for-you message that weight the tale, but Noah's preference for learning on the lam readily bridges the dozen-decade gap between prairie boy and reader. Farnsworth supplies plenty of gauzy full-page scenes of a close-knit family (prone to striking picture perfect poses) to keep newly independent readers paging on through. EB

BOYNTON, SANDRA *Yay, You! Moving Out, Moving Up, Moving On*; written and illus. by Sandra Boynton. Simon, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-689-84283-X \$14.95 M Gr. 7-12

Boynton opens with a congratulatory exhortation that ends on a questioning note—"You did it! You're done! You made it! You're through!// OH, WHAT A GREAT MOMENT!// Now what will you do?"—followed by a series of potential life choices. Numerous possibilities (from where to live to discovering the meaning of life) are offered in jingly rhyme accompanied by Boynton's popular comic cartoon animals. While the author's other picture-book titles, especially *Dinosaur's Binkit* (BCCB 12/98), have veered away from Hallmark-y verse and concentrated a bit more on intended audience and plot, this title is clearly aimed at the crowd that gives Seuss' *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* (BCCB 3/90) to adults as a rite-of-passage present. This is a thirty-two-page extended greeting card, with limited child-appeal and very little practical use in a children's library collection. JMD

BROWNE, ANTHONY *My Dad*; written and illus. by Anthony Browne. Farrar, 2001 26p
ISBN 0-374-35101-5 \$16.00 Ad 4-6 yrs

"He's all right, my dad," is the understated running refrain of this paean to an ordinary, heroic father. The kid's-eye-view narration lists Dad's stellar gifts and talents ("He can wrestle with giants, or win the fathers' race on field day, easily") with loving bias, ending with an inarguable assertion of love on both sides. The main impact here comes from the illustrations, which feature a rumpled everyday Dad in striped jammies, slippers, and plaid bathrobe. His performance of extraordinary feats is therefore sweetly comic (the idea continues in other domestic touches, such as Dad's tightrope being a clothesline), and when the art takes similes literally (Dad can "eat like a horse," "swim like a fish," and so on), picturing Dad as the relevant critter, his costume identifies him. The parental portrait is appealing, but many youngsters will be waiting through the catalogue for a plot that never comes; the revision of one page in the American edition results in a gratuitous and out-of-place negative (and a stereotypical one to boot) that's a disservice to the heroic vision. This nonetheless has a solid, unsentimental approach to its affectionate overview that will resonate with kids when more flowery paternal offerings fall by the wayside. DS

CHAMBERS, VERONICA *Quinceañera Means Sweet 15*. Hyperion, 2001 [192p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-7868-2426-3 \$16.49
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7868-0497-1 \$15.99
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 6-9

Almost-fifteen-year-old Marisol (from *Marisol and Magdalena*, BCCB 1/99) is back in New York after spending an eye-opening year in Panama with her grandmother.

Longtime pal Magdalena (aka Magda) has found companionship with Marisa and Elizabeth in Marisol's absence, and Marisa is determined to shut Marisol out. The discovery that Magda is shoplifting expensive items with her new buddies contributes to Marisol's estrangement from her best friend (who labels Marisol a nerd when she won't indulge in the "five-finger discount"). Although hurt by Magda's defection, Marisol carries on: she earns the money for her *quinceañera* dress, starts dating a nice boy, learns to tolerate her mother's new love interest, and, with the help of her *padrinos* (godparents), gets the *quinceañera* party of her dreams. In a predictable turn of events, Magda and her light-fingered friends get picked up for shoplifting, and Magda's father cancels her elaborate *quinceañera* party to teach her a lesson. Unanswered questions (why isn't Magda arrested after shoplifting?) and dangling plot points (what happened to Marisa and Elizabeth, who simply drop out of the story?) mar the smooth flow of the action, and awkward phrasing ("she sat with her head in her lap") is unintentionally funny. While depictions of father figures lack depth, characterizations of the women have a comforting concreteness, and the scenes set within the extended families have humor and heart. The cover photograph, unfortunately, shows two girls who appear much younger than the teenagers in the book, which may put some readers off; otherwise, this is decent light fiction that provides an inside look at an important cultural event and rite of passage. JMD

CHORAO, KAY *Shadow Night*; written and illus. by Kay Choro. Dutton, 2001 [32p]

ISBN 0-525-46685-1 \$15.99

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 3-6 yrs

Anyone who has ever lost sleep over the Rorschach shadows on a moonlit bedroom wall will be able to sympathize with young James, who sees "MONSTERS!"—until his folks tie back the fluttering curtains and show him how to make his own shadow pictures. The cast of the back-to-bedtime story the grownups tell (and show) includes spiders with five "legs" (fingers), along with other one-hand shadow puppets (snail, bird, goose, dog) and two-handers (alligator and elephant). A pedestrian plot and clumsy text ("Everyone laughed. Ha-ha") flatten the impromptu tale, as do the contrived cartoon-like depictions of the imagined animals, which supplement the milky hues and muted brights of the more realistically rendered bedtime frame story. The visual instructions for making these puppets are easy to follow, however, so this title should bring digital entertainment within the grasp of its audience. FK

CRUNK, TONY *Grandpa's Overalls*; illus. by Scott Nash. Orchard, 2001 [32p]

ISBN 0-531-30321-7 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

R 4-7 yrs

There's pandemonium down on the farm. Grandpa's overalls have made a daring break for it, and the chase is on. Grandpa, the extended family, and the neighbors (all anthropomorphized hounds) chug along behind the runaway duds, but the pants are simply too quick for them. Still, there's work to be done, and since "a man can't work in his long-handled drawers," Grandpa has to take the day off while everyone else pitches in to do his share. At sunset they're all pretty pleased with their day's work—until they catch the errant overalls in an amorous moonlight tryst with Grandma's nightgown. "A body can't sleep without her long-

tailed nightie," says Grandma, and the chase is on again. Never have denim pants sported quite the personality of Nash's cheeky, ebullient overalls as they dash through the fields with bib rivets gleaming like white eyeballs and straps pumping like wiry arms. Their getaway astride a grinning, piggy-bank styled porker, chased by a pack of huffing, puffing pursuers, should be a crowd-pleaser. Use this to whip up the storytime set, or perhaps employ it as an offbeat love story for Valentine's Day giggles. EB

DEVITA, JAMES *Blue*. Geringer/HarperCollins, 2001 [288p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029546-5 \$14.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029545-7 \$14.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 4-7

Morgan is at first predisposed to regard his visions of a watery world and visits by a mysterious fish-eyed old man as the overactive imaginings of a mind bored and dissatisfied with his adolescent life. Scaly growths creeping up his body and soaring fevers that can only be assuaged by constant soaks in a cold bath are more difficult to dismiss; by the time Morgan is rushed to the hospital his voice is little more than a mumble and his fondest hope seems to be confirmed—he really is turning into a blue marlin. As doctors posit diagnoses and apply futile treatments in an effort to restore him to unwanted normalcy (or failing that, at least to make waves in the medical journals), the boy psychically rushes to embrace his fate. The night before life-threatening surgery to remove the spiked fin from his backbone, Morgan is whisked away by a band of partially transformed marlin men who take him to the sea and mentor him in preparation for his release into the wild Atlantic. DeVita traverses a fine line between comedy and fantasy with considerable success, poking fun at the medical community with kid-accessible satire while respecting Morgan's yearning to be the person, or creature, nature intends him to be. Several characters—notably Morgan's parents and a friendly, bumbling nurse—are underdrawn, and DeVita reels out a little more plotline than is needed, but readers not quite up to the darker challenge of Dickinson's *Eva* (BCCB 5/89) should take the plunge. EB

ELLIOTT, DAVID *The Transmogrification of Roscoe Wizzle*. Candlewick, 2001 [128p]

ISBN 0-7636-1173-5 \$12.99

Reviewed from galleys

M Gr. 3-5

Roscoe's simply delighted that his sleepy town is now home to a Gussy's Restaurant, which features toothsome Jungle Drum burgers hawked by the endearing Gussy Gorilla mascot. He's even more pleased when his neglectful parents supply him with a steady stream of cash so he can gorge on Drums nightly while they dodge kitchen duties. Gussy International has built its restaurant on a toxic dump, however, and as mutant bugs find their way into the meat grinder (and hence into customers), several town children begin to display bug-like features and must be abducted and hidden by the corporation's honchos. Elliott introduces motifs worthy of satiric exploration—America's reliance on fast food, and the disregarded dangers of polluted soil—but what could have been feature-length screwball comedy with a dash of social commentary amounts here to little more than a four-minute Looney Tune, complete with chase scene. Roscoe's narration is precious and frequently repetitive, and no character, including Roscoe himself, rises above cartoon. Still, if the library closes in ten minutes and the book report's due in the

morning, the catchy title, loopy premise, and low page count may tempt a reader on the run. EB

FINN, ISOBEL *The Very Lazy Ladybug*; illus. by Jack Tickle. Tiger Tales, 2001 [26p]

ISBN 1-58925-007-9 \$14.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 2-4 yrs

Lazy Ladybug never learned how to fly, so to get from place to place she hitches rides on passing animals. She hops into a kangaroo's pouch, "but the kangaroo liked to JUMP! 'I can't sleep in here,' cried the lazy ladybug, 'It's too bumpy,'" so she hops on a passing tiger who likes to "ROAR," and from there to a crocodile who likes to "SWISH his tail in the water," etc., until she finally hitches a ride on an elephant. The elephant sneezes, and "poor old lazy ladybug had to fly at last!" Tickle's illustrations are rendered in a confectionery palette of frosting pinks, greens, and blues. The animals are generically cute, including a bright yellow monkey, a blue bear, and a purple-striped tiger, all peacefully coexisting in a nonspecific but bucolically leafy setting. The text is unsurprising, but variations in the typeface add emphasis to the action. Viewers probably won't mind the cumulative predictability, and they'll happily join the ladybug's refrain of "I can't sleep here." JMD

FLEISCHMAN, SID *Bo & Mzzz Mad*. Greenwillow, 2001 [112p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029398-5 \$14.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029397-7 \$14.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 5-8

The Martinkas and their distant cousins the Gamages have been feuding with each other over old wrongs for several generations, but that doesn't stop recently orphaned Bo Gamage; after his father dies, Bo flees social workers and foster care by running away to the only family he has left, the Martinkas. In the Mojave Desert ghost town of Queen of Sheba he meets thirteen-year-old Madeleine (Mzzz Mad), her artist aunt, Juna, and her grandfather, Paw Paw (aka Charlie). Old Charlie is depressed, and Juna has a plan to "jumpstart" his life with a (faked) map to the lost gold mine he's been seeking for years, and she needs Bo's help to make her scheme work. The arrival of two somewhat bumbling thieves fleeing the local sheriff adds humor to the family feud, even as they provide a very real sense of danger. Characterizations are slight but sharp, the dialogue between Bo and Mzzz Mad is fast and funny, and the setting has a romantic cowboys-in-the-desert allure. The discovery of the real map (and evidence that exonerates both families) unites the Gamages and the Martinkas, and the story ends with Bo happily remaining as one of the family. The plot's logic doesn't bear close scrutiny (didn't anyone back in San Francisco notice that Bo's father was dead and he was alone?), and the fast pace obscures but does not eliminate the contrived eccentricity of it all. Still, there is a good-natured sense of adventure here that readers will enjoy despite the unlikely plot, and the movie of the week sensibilities will be just the ticket for those looking for a quick, enjoyable ride. Fleischman includes a note explaining aspects of desert lore. JMD

FLETCHER, RALPH *Uncle Daddy*. Holt, 2001 133p

ISBN 0-8050-6663-2 \$15.95

R Gr. 3-5

Rivers was three when his father left. Now finishing fourth grade, he's accustomed to his family life with his mother and her great uncle, known to Rivers as

Uncle Daddy; he's convinced that if he encountered his father, he'd "give him something I've been planning for a long time. I'd wind up and sock him as hard as I could, right in the stomach." When his father does turn up—in the midst of the traditional family celebration of Rivers' Un-Birthday, a pre-departure invention of his father—Rivers and family are, however, simply stunned. Dad has finally gotten clean after years of a drug and booze problem, and he's intent on being a part of his son's life. Reacquaintance is awkward, and the family already under strain is thrown into new turmoil when Uncle Daddy suffers a life-threatening heart attack. While the title may elicit snickers from more jaundiced kids, this is a gentle yet solid story about family life rearranged. Uncle Daddy is a loving and entertaining character, redeemed from saintliness by his hostility towards Rivers' returned dad. Rivers is a credible kid, fending off and eventually succumbing to the friendship overtures of the annoying Ethan as he reels from the changes in the heart of his life and gradually acknowledging that his father's return might not be a bad thing. This has an accessibility unusual for such a serious topic, and middle-graders looking for a family story with some gravity will find it here. DS

FRADIN, DENNIS BRINDELL *My Family Shall Be Free!: The Life of Peter Still*. HarperCollins, 2001 190p illus. with photographs
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029328-4 \$16.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029595-3 \$16.95 R Gr. 5-9

In *Bound for the North Star* (BCCB 12/00), Fradin offered an abbreviated history of Peter Still's struggle for freedom from slavery; here this remarkable life receives the in-depth treatment it richly deserves. Still (a family name assumed by his relatives) and his brother Levin were left in slavery when their mother and sisters escaped to freedom; Levin died a slave, but years of patient saving and maneuvering of masters finally garnered Peter release. However, this barely marked the beginning of his tale, because his wife and children remained in bondage and heart-breaking years would pass before the entire family (all but one child) was at last reunited. Fradin deftly toggles between the branches of the Still family in Northern freedom and Southern bondage, steadily converging their stories with cinematic precision and pacing until the near-miraculous meeting of freedman Peter and his abolitionist brother William, whom he had never met. Steering clear of sentimentality, Fradin nonetheless presents facts so moving that even readers who know that Peter achieves his "happy ending" will be caught up in the tension. A bibliography and index will be of service to student researchers, but this gripping adventure will extend its appeal far beyond the pedestrian biography report. EB

GEORGE, KRISTINE O'CONNELL *Toasting Marshmallows: Camping Poems*; illus. by Kate Kiesler. Clarion, 2001 48p
ISBN 0-618-04597-X \$15.00 R Gr. 3-5

Thirty poems, mostly unrhymed, treat the splendors of camping in the woods. Entries address aspects such as wildlife (deer, owls, and, of course, mosquitoes), pastimes (fishing, skipping rocks, exploration), and departure (including the keeping of memories). While the poems run to the prosaic, George has made an evocative selection of elements and cleverly employed realistic details (the mystical milieu of the bait shop, the otherworldly glow of the flashlight at night, the family dog's surprising reversion to protector of his pack) that will elicit hidden memories for experienced campers and beckon the stay-at-homes to pack their tents. Kiesler's

thick acrylics often leave the human figures stiff and indistinct, but the scenery has a majestic sweep and the wildlife a fluid immediacy; spot art, varied compositions and interesting perspectives, and changing layouts keep the poetic collection from becoming a static gallery. Though more plainspoken than lyrical, this is nonetheless an effectively atmospheric verse series that could serve as both camping introduction and memento. DS

GILLARD, DENISE *Music from the Sky*; illus. by Stephen Taylor. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 2001 [24p]
ISBN 0-88899-311-0 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 4-7 yrs

An early riser, the narrator of this down-to-earth tale is told to put on her boots and help her grampa search the marsh for "the right branch" to whittle into a flute. While the story has a distinct voice and rhythm, the child's narration sounds a little forced and verges on the precious ("I've seen the long, shiny silver flute sounding so pretty, just like music from the sky"); words attributed to Grampa characterize him a bit more naturally (the marsh is the "perfect place for getting making stuff"). Focused on the border between the material world of the grandchild and the natural world her grandfather shares with her, this story also looks to the spiritual world: a note on the dedication page points out that the airborne music the young girl hears is an allusion to a traditional spiritual, "Over my head, I hear music in the air." Soft blues, fresh greens, warm browns, white—lots of strategically used negative space—accentuate the pristine spaciousness of the setting for this quiet adventure, which takes place in "rural Nova Scotia in one of Canada's oldest black communities." Representatives of two generations—grandfather and granddaughter—interact in almost every illustration, though their faces are sometimes frustratingly undefined. Musical youngsters may object that what the protagonist receives is more a recorder than a flute and that the actual flute pictured is wrongly positioned. Most young viewers, however, are likely to respond to the strong appeal of this comfortable relationship between a knowing elder and a confident child. FK

GRAVES, KEITH *Pet Boy*; written and illus. by Keith Graves. Chronicle, 2001 34p
ISBN 0-8118-2672-4 \$12.95

Ad 5-8 yrs

Stanley loves buying new pets, but his interest quickly wanes: "He studied each one carefully/ and played with it awhile,/ then he locked it in a cage/ and stacked it in a pile." One day he goes into a very strange pet shop, and the next thing he knows, he's been kidnapped by an alien (from "Far Out Pets—We deliver"), and he's on his way to another planet to be somebody's pet. Stanley flees his owner, Jopnar, only to be captured by an iron moth from Pet Control: "The moth brought Stanley to the pound/ and dropped him in the clink,/ where strays not claimed by end of day/ are soon to be extinct." Jopnar comes to the rescue and takes Stanley back to his "natural habitat" (Earth); Stanley goes home a changed pet owner and never neglects his animal pals again. This fable-let is more than a little predictable, but the delivery is funny and the details are original. Graves is a quirky if not always adept versifier, and while the abcb rhyme scheme gets wearying, his bent quatrains have enough idiosyncrasies to circumvent the singsong when read aloud. Acrylic and colored pencil illustrations feature space ships and robots in the style

of old Flash Gordon movies, and the palette includes intense hues of tropical pink and acid green. This would work as a group readaloud, but kids are going to want to get their hands on this far-out pet parable so they can get a better view of the pictures. JMD

GRIMM, JAKOB LUDWIG KARL *The Rabbit's Bride*; ad. by Lucy Crane and Holly Meade; illus. by Holly Meade. Cavendish, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-7614-5081-5 \$15.95 R 3-7 yrs

A girl and her mother live "in a beautiful cabbage garden" that is being consumed by a marauding rabbit: "At last the woman said to her daughter, 'Go into the garden and drive out the rabbit.'" Three times the daughter "shoo-shoo"s the rabbit, and three times the rabbit invites the maiden to go to his hutch; the third time's the charm and off she goes, riding on the rabbit's tail. Once at the hutch the girl is sad and lonely, and, despite the rabbit's urging, she delays their wedding while she makes "a figure of straw" and dresses it in her own clothes. The maiden then escapes in her ruffled pink panties back to her mother. In Meade's verdant watercolors, "the maiden" is a little girl, the rabbit is a big white pooka-like figure, and the overt action is on the level of make-believe play. The language (Meade uses Lucy Crane's 1886 translation for most of her text) is so spare as to be nearly bare, but the crisp brevity of the text makes this story work on a narrative level. Garden and countryside images sweep across the cream-colored paper in shades of leaves-in-sunshine and leaves-in-shadow green; the red-eyed rabbit provides a sense of the just barely magical that is reinforced by his changing size from spread to spread. Although a moment is spared for the sadness of the jilted rabbit (depicted in an eyes-covered, ears-flopped curl of lapine grief), "back in the beautiful cabbage garden, the maiden's mother was happy. And so was the maiden." Meade balances the deceptively simple but resonant text with the innocence of her characters, and while her dedication ("To all the maidens who take a ride with the rabbit. And who with courage and creativity find a way home") indicates that Meade is well aware of the story's subtleties, she deliberately plays against them, to great success. Younger listeners will happily follow the little girl on her breathtaking bareback-bunny ride. JMD

HADDIX, MARGARET PETERSON *The Girl with 500 Middle Names*; illus. by Janet Hamlin. Simon, 2001 82p
ISBN 0-689-84135-3 \$15.00 R Gr. 3-4

Janie's mother is finally fed up with the poor standards and limited resources of Janie's current school, so the family ups stakes and moves. Though Janie is academically ready for the challenge of her new third grade, she can't keep up with the financial and sartorial capabilities of her classmates, and she thinks (with some justification) that they're looking down on her. To make matters worse, the shop that was to sell Janie's mother's custom-knit, personalized sweaters—bringing in enough money to offset their new, higher rent—reneges on the deal, leaving the family with a pile of unresaleable sweaters and bills they may not be able to pay. More familiar for her dramatic novels for young adults (*Turnabout*, BCCB 7/00), Haddix does a capable job of spinning a yarn for middle-grades readers. Janie's solid, strong-minded narration is convincing, and there are effective but not schmaltzy reminders about the difficulties many families endure to achieve ends that other families may take for granted. Janie's solution to the situation (she

expands her straitened wardrobe by wearing the personalized sweaters to school, each day claiming that the embroidered moniker is her middle name) is inventive; the result is fairy-tale-ish (increased exposure results in increased demand for Janie's mother's work, and nobody at the school enacts a no-advertising-with-clothes ban) but satisfying. Janie's prickly defensiveness in the face of a classmate's clear wish to be friends adds credibility and ensures that Janie isn't a goody-goody. The long, flowing strokes of Hamlin's charcoal sketches helpfully avoid cuteness and emphasize dignity. The combination of cozy and challenging elements will make this a good fit for many young readers. DS

HOW MANY? HOW MUCH? ISBN 0-670-89652-7; *Letters and Sounds*; ISBN 0-670-89651-9. Each book: based on characters created by Rosemary Wells; illus. by Michael Koelsch. Viking, 2001 24p (Get Set for Kindergarten! Books) \$13.99 R 2-5 yrs

Parents anxious to assure that their Wunderkinds excel in their academic debuts will welcome these sane, sound strategies for preparing children to tackle ABCs and 1-2-3s. This pair of titles, designed more as source books than read-throughs, suggest mini-lessons that parents/caregivers and tykes can approach as informal anytime-anywhere play to introduce number concepts and integers, and the relation between sound and symbol. There are rhyming games and simple letter treasure hunts; pattern sequencing, rudimentary measurement skills, a penny "bake sale," and very important practice in dialing an emergency phone number. Illustrations are based on Rosemary Wells' characters, and although they don't evince her fine level of spit and polish, many children will recognize and welcome them as familiar pals. Parents looking for a reality check on their child's school-readiness should take a look. Now, the only skills left to address would be toy sharing, hand washing, coat buttoning, sneaker tying, lip zipping, turn taking, hand raising . . . EB

HUCK, CHARLOTTE *The Black Bull of Norrøway*; illus. by Anita Lobel. Greenwillow, 2001 40p
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16901-5 \$15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16900-7 \$15.95 R 7-10 yrs

Huck's retelling of this Scottish folktale closely follows the pattern previously laid by a long line of retellers, including Joseph Jacobs, Andrew Lang, and Flora Annie Steele. Peggy Ann, youngest of three sisters, wishes for a husband good and kind, and ends up with the Black Bull (actually the enchanted Duke) of Norrøway. Peggy Ann loses her love, finds him again, and, with the help of some magical gifts, saves him from marrying a witch's ugly daughter. In the end, "the Duke of Norrøway and his Peggy Ann lived happily ever after." This variation on "East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon" has many familiar moments for folktalerati, and they will appreciate the memorable motifs. Lobel's illustrations have a sturdy, literal straightforwardness that matches the no-nonsense text. The drafting is a bit disproportionate (especially regarding the Black Bull), and the colors are subdued; the characters' faces are lively and expressive, however, and even the Black Bull emotes effectively. An author's note gives Huck's sources and states her preference for seeking out "traditional tales that show plucky girls" rather than "writing modern fairy tales with brave heroines." This is a solid addition to comparative folktale and storytelling collections; storytellers and their listeners will appreciate the variety. JMD

JOHNSTON, TONY *My Best Friend Bear*; illus. by Joy Allen. Rising Moon, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-87358-775-8 \$15.95 Ad 3-6 yrs

The pigtailed narrator immediately confides: "My old bear is my best friend. Sometimes I tell him secrets. Sometimes I tell him jokes. Sometimes I read 'The Three Bears' to him. Sometimes we dance the kookamonga all around the house." Bear is a reassuring wonder, but "he has danced the kookamonga so gaily, his stuffing is all danced out." The little girl and her mother embark on a mission to restore the faithful toy to his former glory, employing new cloth, new buttons, new stuffing, new mouth, a bubble bath, and a spell on the clothesline in the warm sun. The voice of the narrator is personable and funny, her declarations and directions both engagingly officious and disarmingly anxious. The illustrations—watercolor, pen and ink, and colored pencil, digitally enhanced—are nearly all full-spread, with unusual perspectives that will catch even those storytimers in the back row. The lengthy text doesn't entirely manage to skirt the sentimental, and the illustrations, with their sloppy proportions and caricatured emotions, err on the side of cutesiness, an impression reinforced by the curlicue font and changing size and pastel colors of the typeface. The preciousness may be mitigated by the distance of group viewing, however, and kids will appreciate the gravity of the narrator's situation. Have listeners bring their own bears and prepare to dance the kookamonga all over the library. JMD

KARR, KATHLEEN *Playing with Fire*. Farrar, 2001 192p
ISBN 0-374-23453-1 \$16.00 Ad Gr. 6-9

Greer looks after her mother, fortune-teller Madame Camille, more than vice versa, and she is paying particular attention to her parent at the moment: she believes that Madame Camille's latest "gentleman friend," Drake Morley, is trouble on two feet. Morley arranges for mother and daughter to spend the summer of 1924 in a mansion on Long Island, in order to conduct seances. (Caldecott, the owner of the mansion, is desperate to contact his beloved late wife.) Greer makes friends with brother and sister domestics Leo and Peg; her adventures with the siblings and her kindling romance with Leo help distract her from the fraud being perpetrated by Morley. When Greer, assisting her mother at the seances, begins to raise real spirits, Morley's scheme (and the plot) spins out of control. Revelations about attempted murder and successful matricide send Morley into a delusional state that conveniently requires institutionalizing, and everyone else lives happily ever after in a cottage on the beach. All this melodrama needs a quicker pace and more fluid action than Karr provides here, and very little historical context is provided for the spiritualism craze of the era. Nonetheless, the characters are functional if sketchy, and the scenes at the beach and on the water are saltily evoked. Those readers interested in mystical motifs may make a brief stop here. JMD

KASTNER, JILL *Princess Dinosaur*; written and illus. by Jill Kastner. Greenwillow, 2001 32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-17046-3 \$15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-17045-5 \$15.95 Ad 3-5 yrs

When *Princess Dinosaur* (a fetching green T. rex in a billowing red skirt and gold crown) "wakes up from her nap," she "looks for something to do." Her wild antics offer entertainment—and some annoyance—to the other toys in her room, but

then Spots, the family dog, grabs Princess Dinosaur, bolts, and buries her in the yard; fortunately, she's able to dig herself out and make her way back. While there are some nice elements in the narrative ("Luckily, Princess Dinosaur has long, sharp, pointy claws"), it's rather formless: the beginning doesn't seem to relate to her doggy kidnapping, and even that plot point isn't shaped into drama. The oversized (dino-sized?) art is original and effective, though; Kastner's thickly applied watercolors sometimes have the texture of acrylics, lending a lively solidity to the animated toys and to the bumptious Spots. Princess Dinosaur is an expressive multi-fanged heroine; her obvious displeasure as she climbs out of her hole in the ground (in an escapade of self-archaeology?) won't be lost on the young audience, and they'll root for her return to her fellow toys. Despite the weak plot, the charismatic protagonist and the enduringly alluring concept of toys alive (and the echoes of *Toy Story*) may draw youngsters. DS

KEHRET, PEG *The Hideout*. Minstrel, 2001 [160p]

ISBN 0-671-03420-0 \$16.00

Reviewed from galleys

M Gr. 5-8

Thirteen-year-old Jeremy's parents were recently killed in a random shooting at the mall; as if that weren't enough, the train Jeremy takes en route to his new home with his uncle Phil wrecks, killing many passengers. Traumatized and uninterested in going to his uncle's for a summer of isolation, Jeremy plans to hide in the woods and take stock of his life. He fortuitously finds an abandoned cabin with a well-stocked cupboard, and prepares to ride out the summer months. Unfortunately, he runs afoul of an illegal poaching operation that is hunting bears in the vicinity, and, having been taught by his activist parents about the importance of animal rights (they were shot while leaving their volunteer work at the mall's Humane Society store), he knows it is his duty to stop them. Thanks to the help of Bonnie, a girl with whom he instantly becomes friends after meeting her at the general store, Jeremy is able to save the day, stopping the poachers for good. Although the opening action is absorbing and Jeremy's tragic past gives him some immediate appeal, the concatenation of coincidental events is overwhelmingly implausible. Additionally, the conclusion of the book is hampered by a heavy-handed message about responsibility, as Jeremy is infused with an artificially adult voice: "I wanted to run away from my difficulties, to pretend I was on vacation and everything was okay. . . . But all I did was make new problems without solving the old ones. I guess I can't hide from reality; I have to face it." Although some readers will be engrossed in this fast-paced adventure story, most will want to reread old Paulsen favorites instead. KM

KURTZ, JANE *Jakarta Missing*. Greenwillow, 2001 [272p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029402-7 \$15.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029401-9 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 5-9

Twelve-year-old Dakar—polyglot, "worrymeister," storyteller—has recently come "home" to the U.S. after a childhood spent in Africa, where her father worked as a researcher and relief worker; her only sibling, Jakarta (adopted four years before Dakar's birth), has elected to stay behind. Without the big sister who has always been her fearless leader, Dakar has had to face her demons (and her first North Dakota winter) alone, cultivating invisibility around her peers (aka "wildebeests")

but also testing—and expanding—her limits. After a bomb goes off near her sister's boarding school in Nairobi, Dakar tries even harder to control herself and her world: she sets herself tasks (doing "three really brave things") and seeks wisdom from surrounding grownups. Dakar's father is too distracted and her mother too emotionally withdrawn to help much during this crisis: in fact, both are called away soon after Jakarta (safe and sound) rejoins the family. The second half of the novel focuses on how Dakar and, eventually, her family, realign themselves, with much of the external action generated by the girls' basketball team Jakarta leads to "regionals" while flirting with—and rejecting a chance to claim—a school shooting record. As filtered through Dakar's responses to them, her family's efforts to strike a balance between their individual needs and their responsibility to the greater good of family, team, and humanity ring true. Closer to home (and more diffuse) than Abelow's *Go and Come Back* (BCCB 4/98), this too offers glimpses outside the usual boxes, gently expanding the reader's understanding of how "terrifying and wonderful" life can be. FK

LESTER, JULIUS *The Blues Singers: Ten Who Rocked the World*; illus. by Lisa Cohen. Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, 2001 [48p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-7868-2405-0 \$16.49
Trade ed. ISBN 0-7868-0463-7 \$15.99
Reviewed from galleys R 6-9 yrs

This is a punchy little collective biography: four pages per blues legend (ten singers, each featured with a portrait by Lisa Cohen) packed with tasty bits and pieces of biographical information and lore. Lester's introduction ("A Grandfather Talks to His Granddaughter") places blues music in its musical and historical context and leads into his chat about the legends: Bessie Smith, Robert Johnson, Mahalia Jackson, Muddy Waters, Billie Holiday, B. B. King, Ray Charles, Little Richard, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin. Each artist's chapter opens with a full-page portrait; the first text page of the biographical sketch has dates and places of births and deaths, and quotes from other musicians about the singer featured. The tone is geared for kitchen-table storytelling with the sound system on. Lester's descriptions are juicy ("Brother Sun turned back his rays so Robert wouldn't sweat"; "she reached deep inside the words until she could feel their hearts beating") and his selection of anecdotes winning (Bessie Smith chased away KKK members yelling, "You better pick up your sheets and get out of here!"; popular wisdom said Robert Johnson made a deal with the devil so he could play his guitar so "unusual and eerie"). It's difficult to describe music in words, but Lester manages to evoke enough feeling to pique listeners' musical curiosity. Describing B. B. King, he says, "When he plays, B. B. closes his eyes and scrunches up his face like he's in pain. But that's because his feelings are going straight from his heart into his fingers." The bibliography lists a half-dozen general reference books on the blues, websites, and titles on each individual artist. A "Recommended Listening" list of LPs and CDs is included. JMD

LESTER, JULIUS *When Dad Killed Mom*. Silver Whistle/Harcourt, 2001 [176p]
ISBN 0-15-216305-0 \$17.00
Reviewed from galleys R Gr. 7-10

Jeremy, age eight, and Jenna, age fourteen, are relatively affectionate siblings with relatively nice lives that include artist mother Rachel, psychologist father Eric,

decent clothes, big house, good schools. Their normal routine is interrupted the day their father shoots their mother in cold blood on a busy street. Lester's focus is on the siblings' response to the murder and their subsequent courses of action. Jeremy is serious, calm, and devastated by the death of his mother. He stays in his mother's studio, connected to the outside world by his mother's cell phone, his paternal grandfather overseeing him from the main house. Daddy's girl Jenna is self-centered, dramatic, and incredibly confused. Shocked out of adolescent self-absorption, she reels from the loss of both her mother and her father, all the while wondering whether she contributed in some concrete way to the tragedy. Jeremy and Jenna each narrate alternate chapters, often retelling the same incident from their different points of view, always adding more subtle pieces to the tragic puzzle their lives have become. The drama of the present and the recent past unfolds at a steadily increasing pace; the author draws out the suspense and keeps the reader uncertain of the outcome until the bitter end. Insight into the "why" of the murder is supplied by Rachel's own words—the voice of the murdered woman is heard through her journal, discovered (and kept secret) by Jeremy. Novels have the luxury of literary closure, and Lester takes advantage of the opportunity to supply brother and sister with as happy an ending as possible. Readers will be caught up by the fast-flowing current of emotions, events, and revelations. JMD

LEWIN, TED *Red Legs: A Drummer Boy of the Civil War*; written and illus. by Ted Lewin. HarperCollins, 2001 [32p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16025-5 \$15.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16024-7 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

R 6-9 yrs

With quiet trepidation, Union drummer Stephen ponders the coming day and, at daylight, musters with fellow soldiers, beating the tattoo that takes them into battle. A furious battle it is, and although the drummers have been left in the protected rear, a Confederate bullet finds its way to Stephen's chest. His father finds the fallen lad and "helps him up. . . . They can all go home because . . . this battle was a reenactment of a Civil War battle." Lewin keeps his surprise carefully hidden until the final spreads, and even with clear hindsight and careful reexamination, viewers are unlikely to find a clue of what is to come—unless Stephen's fall and death pose can be considered in retrospect as slightly stiff and tidy. The success of Lewin's ploy can be attributed both to his careful attention to detail in the sun-dappled watercolor scenes and to the high standards of authenticity cherished by avid reenactors. The closing page comments on Civil War reenactments and on the Union regiment in which real-life drummer Stephen Barrow participated. Lewin observes that reenactment is a way to honor the memory of fallen soldiers from both camps, and reminds listeners that "100,000 child soldiers did not get up and go home." EB

LITTLE, JEAN *Emma's Yucky Brother*; illus. by Jennifer Plecas. HarperCollins, 2001 64p (I Can Read Books)

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028349-1 \$14.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028348-3 \$14.95

R Gr. 1-2

Noted author Little introduced Emma in *Emma's Magic Winter* (BCCB 10/98), but here she's undergoing a change that isn't just seasonal: she's becoming a big sister. Her parents are adopting four-year-old Max, and she's thrilled, waving his

picture at her friend Sally (who, a big sister herself, knows that the euphoria won't last). Emma has a rude awakening when Max visits and rejects her in favor of Sally and her little brother; when he finally moves in, they begin to get the balance of pestiferous siblinghood and familial bonds down right. This is a simple and un-sentimental story about siblings; the theme of older-child adoption (rare for this age group) is handled straightforwardly, but the emotions (and terminology—Emma is “yucky” and Max is, of course, a “pest”) will be recognizable to all kinds of families. The easy-reader style and format are unthreatening; “adoption” and related words are the hardest ones here, so kids familiar with the concept will find the rest of this pretty smooth going. Plecas continues to be one of the most reliable illustrators of easy readers: her slender yet sturdy lines create expressive and realistically rumply characters; nice touches range from the multiracial cast (Sally and her brother are African American) to details such as Dad's glasses pushed up on his forehead the better to cuddle Max. Many young readers will appreciate the unusual theme, and the easygoing narrative will keep them reading. DS

LONDON, JONATHAN *Park Beat: Rhymin' through the Seasons*; illus. by Woodleigh Marx Hubbard. HarperCollins, 2001 [32p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-688-13995-7 \$15.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-13994-9 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 5-8 yrs

London's verse takes listeners through the year season by season, starting with fall (“Dogs yappin’ and geese flappin’./ Fish jumpin’ and apples thumpin’ . . .”), focusing on the action in and around a community park. We're definitely in a temperate zone, with “breath steamin’ and icicles gleamin’” in winter, mud a key aspect of spring (“And now I'm glidin’ in a puddle of mud”), and sprinklers and baseball key elements of summer. The dropped participial *g* gimmick is superfluous at best, but the details are atmospheric and seasonal moods effectively evoked; the verse structure avoids jingliness by switching patterns and winding up to a seasonal dénouement for each section (though it's too bad there's no overall finish). Hubbard's naïve art uses strong saturated color to energetic effect, with individual objects so solidly constructed they resemble cut paper. In some spreads, in fact, the multiplicity of deep hues muddies the focus and reduces the impact of the landscapes (though youngsters will enjoy poring over the small details in many scenes). This doesn't rise up to the standard of Helderford's *Gather Up, Gather In* (BCCB 10/94), but it's still a lively romp through the year. DS

LONDON, JONATHAN *White Water*; by Jonathan and Aaron London; illus. by Jill Kastner. Viking, 2001 32p

ISBN 0-670-89286-6 \$15.99

R 6-9 yrs

Basing the story on his own experiences with his son, London tells the tale of a father-son rafting trip. The narrating son is initially uncertain (“I was quiet, thinking about how scary it would be”), but he finds that he's enjoying himself on the water (“That rapid was my first one, and it sure was fun”), and he's also enjoying the sights, the camping experience, and his growing expertise. London is skillful and subtle in depicting the narrator's gradual change of heart; the edge of boredom and resentment disappears, and the narrator starts being the one to call “White water!” when they approach rapids; the book also wisely eschews the contrivance of an accident, allowing the drama to come simply from the mastery of bigger rapids

and the completion of a successful, wonderful outing. The language doesn't strain for poetry but offers simple and effective imagery ("the water was white, as if thousands of white rabbits were jumping around us"), and the pleasure of father-son bonding is left implicit. Kastner's expressionist oils generally leave faces indistinct, but as a consequence the natural drama is emphasized: this is a world of billowing white spray and tawny rock, with only touches of blue sky showing beyond the canyon rim. Between the adventure and the parental closeness, this will be a dream vacation for a lot of kids; if the book doesn't work to nag parents into an outing, it can at least provide vicarious satisfaction. DS

MACDONALD, MARGARET READ, ad. *Mabela the Clever*; illus. by Tim Coffey. Whitman, 2001 [32p]

ISBN 0-8075-4902-9 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

R 3-7 yrs

Folklorist MacDonald retells this cautionary tale from the Limba people of Sierra Leone with a zesty panache present from the opening lines: "In the early times, some were clever and some were foolish. The Cat was one of the clever ones. The mice were mostly foolish." The Cat invites the mice to join "the secret Cat society," and the mice eagerly accept. Cat teaches them "the secret Cat Society song": "When we are marching,/ We NEVER look back!/ The Cat is at the end,/ Fo Feng!/ FO FENG!" Off they march, singing, the Cat at the end picking off one mouse for each "FO FENG!" and tossing it into a sack. Clever mouse Mabela is in the lead, and by remembering her father's words of wisdom (look, listen, pay attention to what you are saying, and "if you have to move, move fast!") she saves the day. From tone to pace, MacDonald's choices here are right on the money: this is a cautionary tale that will be rip-roaring fun to tell, listen to, and act out. The father mouse's words of wisdom bear reiteration, and the short song/chant demands repeating. Crayon-colored, pop-eyed little mice and the green-eyed ginger cat stand out against the shades-of-gold-and-green background. Feathery brushstrokes add texture to Coffey's acrylics, and the fantastical setting suits the magical nature of this tale. Compositions are open and clean, and the uncluttered pictures will reach the back row of the storytime or classroom audience. Viewers will follow the father mouse's advice to look (at the pictures), listen (to the story) and pay attention (to the chant); they already know how to move fast. A detailed source note is included. JMD

MACLEOD, ELIZABETH *Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Writer's Life*. Kids Can, 2001 32p illus. with photographs

Trade ed. ISBN 1-55074-487-9 \$14.95

Ad Gr. 4-8

The author of the beloved Anne stories gets the biographical treatment in scrapbook form here. The text is confined to a single column per oversized spread, which anchors layouts filled with spot art, captions, and quotes. The biography is choppily written, with events crammed together and awkwardly connected and some information contradictory ("She never knew how incredibly popular her characters would become around the world" opposite Montgomery's statement "Men and women who are grandparents have written to tell me how they loved Anne, and boys at college have done the same"), but it's a serviceable concise overview. The layout will draw browsers, so even kids familiar with Anne only from readalouds or television will be able to poke around in the Montgomeriana. A

multitude of pictures of Montgomery, her family, and creations and possessions are tucked in the margins and jumbled collage-like on full pages; colored borders and backgrounds preclude stodginess. It's sometimes hard to tell the real realia from the pretend realia (it will be clear to most adults that these aren't really clippings of early Anne reviews, for instance, but kids may not realize that) and the cheesy line-drawn Montgomery figure who utters platitudes and factoids in speech balloons is superfluous. There's such a grand collection of Montgomery and Anne details (an Anne postage stamp, even), though, that Anne fans will doubtless find plenty to absorb them. A timeline, list of Montgomery's books, list of websites and real-life Montgomery sites, and an index are appended. DS

MASUREL, CLAIRE *A Cat and a Dog*; illus. by Bob Kolar. Cheshire Studio/North-South, 2001 32p

Library ed. ISBN 1-55858-950-3 \$13.88

Trade ed. ISBN 1-55858-949-X \$13.95

Ad 2-5 yrs

The titular cat and dog live in the same house and fight like, well, cats and dogs. They take no respite, fighting day and night, and cover all subjects, battling over sitting spots, tasty treats, and especially toys. One day, though, they each suffer toy mishaps they can't resolve on their own. They engage in mutual assistance, the cat retrieving the dog's ball from up a tree and the dog fetching the cat's mouse from the pond, and thereby become "the best of friends." The story is slight and drawn out, and the ending of friendship is predictable from the get-go. The text's simplicity will appeal to young listeners, though, and readers-aloud have some good opportunities for animal sound effects. Kitty and pooch are rendered in complementary—oppositional?—colors, the cat in turquoise, the dog in orange, and they possess a plump, stylized roundness reminiscent of balloon animals. They're quite expressive as they romp through their spare white-backgrounded landscape, which keeps the spreads from becoming static. Despite the shortcomings of the story, the perky art and siblingsque relationship may keep lapsitters involved. DS

MATAS, CAROL *The War Within: A Novel of the Civil War*. Simon, 2001 [160p]

ISBN 0-689-82935-3 \$16.00

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 5-8

The Greens, a staunchly Confederate Jewish family, are less than pleased with the Union occupation of their Tennessee town, but they manage well enough with their general store and even maintain coolly cordial relations with the occupying force. Rebel troops make a reentry and temporarily derail General Grant's plans for an offensive on Vicksburg, but their subsequent withdrawal from the region leaves the civilian population vulnerable to retaliation. Frustrated by the military setback and convinced that area Jews are profiteering in cotton, Grant issues an order to expel all Jews from the occupied region, transforming the Greens at a penstroke from respected members of their community to exiles within their own country. Matas explores a fascinating but little-examined facet of the Civil War and employs it as a springboard to a broader discussion of parallels between Jewish and black discrimination. As unapologetic slave holders, the Greens are forced to confront the possibility that they have ignored the essential humanity of their chattel just as they themselves have been suddenly defined as "inferior." Their

struggle, though convincing, is largely intellectual and plays out in lengthy harangues that undercut the more immediate tension of their forced trek northward. Still, there are balls and belles and yards of silk and tulle to entice readers and a sobering theme to jolt the romance into perspective. EB

MATTHAEI, GAY *The Sketchbook of Thomas Blue Eagle*; by Gay Matthaei and Jewel Grutman; illus. by Adam Cvijanovic. Chronicle, 2001 62p
ISBN 0-8118-2908-1 \$16.95 R Gr. 4-6

This sequel to *The Ledgerbook of Thomas Blue Eagle* stands on its own, taking up the story of an eighteen-year-old Lakota horseman, a fictional but realistic character who accepts Buffalo Bill Cody's invitation to travel with the Wild West Show to Europe. Thomas Blue Eagle's people are destitute on their Pine Ridge Reservation; he needs money to care for his father and marry Echo, the young woman he met at a boarding school. In a tone that varies from wry observation of white people's strange ways to heartbreaking loneliness and cultural disorientation, Blue Eagle describes his ventures in England, France, Spain, and Italy. Of a bullfight, he says, "The Spaniards did not eat the bull. . . . There was no honor in this hunt." On visiting the papal palace, he remarks: "At first I thought Pope's stick was a lance but Cody told us it was a shepherd's hook for catching loose sheep." All of the double spreads are handsomely decorated with wash drawings (ostensibly the work of Blue Eagle), the figures drafted in a naïve style with skillful refinements of composition and color. These illustrations offer visual breaks in a continuous narrative that will require some sustained attention from readers but will reward them with a fresh perspective on the world of 1885. An afterword by a Lakota advisor, Arthur Amiotte, further delineates and authenticates the historical scenario. This fictional account serves as an introduction to a people's often disheartening struggle to continue their way of life despite the dominant culture's efforts to eradicate it. BH

MIKAELSEN, BEN *Touching Spirit Bear*. HarperCollins, 2001 241p
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029149-4 \$15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-380-97744-3 \$15.95 Ad Gr. 6-10

Fifteen-year-old Cole Matthews has been in trouble with the law for years, the consequences of his antisocial behavior mitigated by expensive lawyers hired by his abusive but wealthy father. When Cole violently assaults Peter, a fellow student, he is in trouble so deep his father can't get him out. Garvey, an American Indian parole officer, arranges for the bitterly cynical and devious boy to be tried by Circle Justice, a traditional way of administering justice to the repentant guilty and solace to a wounded community. Garvey and Edwin, a generic wise Indian elder, convey Cole to an island where there is shelter and supplies; he is to remain there alone for a year, contemplating his life. With no intention of staying on the island, Cole burns down the shelter and destroys most of his supplies. After his escape plan fails, he encounters a huge white bear, a Spirit Bear, which severely mauls him. In his pain and delirium, he has a spiritual awakening that convinces him to change his life. Rescued by Garvey and Edwin, Cole recovers, and, determined to make good, he convinces the Circle to send him back to the island. Characterizations are flat and programmatic, with many of the players merely acting as functionaries for the drawn-out, farfetched plot. Cole's transformation from punk to pilgrim is too easily accomplished, and his parroting of American Indian wisdom is irritat-

ingly earnest; on the other hand, his solitary life on the island is just the ticket for Paulsen fans, who will appreciate the survival story. JMD

NAYLOR, PHYLLIS REYNOLDS *Alice Alone*. Karl/Atheneum, 2001 [240p]
ISBN 0-689-82634-6 \$15.00

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 7-9

Alice's eighth-grade year brings her a lot of changes ("I wanted change, and I didn't. Looked forward to it and dreaded it both at the same time"), such as a new school and her father's official engagement to Miss Summers. The worst change is in her relationship with Patrick, her boyfriend of two years; they're not in any of the same classes, it's harder and harder to find time to spend together, and he's friendly with a cute new girl, Penny. A worried and jealous Alice pushes the issue to the point of breakup, which leaves her stunned, lonely, and unsure of herself. This turn is a change for Alice's readers, too, but they'll be reassured by Naylor's sympathetic and uncondescending treatment of Alice's pain. The breakup manages to be upsetting without undermining the well-established goodness of Patrick's character, and Alice's sadness is effectively balanced by her continued growth and the usual helping of narrative humor. The subplots aren't all successful; the revelation about the long-ago molestation of Alice's friend Elizabeth results in an overly easy didactic resolution, and though it's grounded in her character, it undermines the normality of Elizabeth's skittishness about bodies and dating. This is nonetheless a pivotal entry in Alice's adventures in adolescence, and her followers and spiritual sisters won't want to miss it. DS

NIX, GARTH *Lirael*. HarperCollins, 2001 [496p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-027824-2 \$16.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-027823-4 \$16.95

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 7-12

Orphaned Lirael is a Daughter of the Clayr, charter magic adherents with the Sight that enables them to see the future. Most of the Clayr achieve their Sight at or near adolescence, but Lirael is fourteen, and the Sight still eludes her. Desperate to keep from dwelling on her mysterious origins (her mother never identified her father) and lack of Sight, Lirael requests and receives a position as a Librarian in the Great Library of Clayr. Her position in the Library keeps her busy (the realia, which includes magical objects, spell books, and some nasty specimens of Free Magic, is particularly problematic) but provides unforeseen advantages: Lirael has access to sources of knowledge that help her further her self-education as a charter mage, conjure a friend (the very funny "Disreputable Dog"), and take her first steps toward her destiny. A parallel story focuses on Prince Sameth, the youngest child of Abhorsen Sabriel and King Touchstone, and the designated heir to the Abhorsen. After a meeting with Hedge, a dark necromancer, Sameth cannot face his preordained future and flees. Nix alternates between Lirael and Sameth, driving both characters toward their inevitable meeting, the moment when Lirael fishes Sameth out of the river and their destinies become irrevocably entwined. Nix has the benefit here of a much longer book than *Sabriel* (BCCB 12/96), and the result is a richly textured exploration into the hearts and minds of his two heroes. By the time readers get to the cliffhanger conclusion, they will have accompanied two very different characters on their physical and metaphysical journeys. The plot is

filled with hair-raising escapes, desperate flights, relentless pursuits, and magical duels, described in sensual language that makes the scenes live. JMD

O'CONNOR, BARBARA *Moonpie and Ivy*. Farrar, 2001 152p
ISBN 0-374-35059-0 \$16.00

Ad Gr. 5-8

When Pearl's mother, Ruby, takes Pearl to visit Ruby's sister, Ivy, and then disappears in the middle of the night, Pearl is no more surprised by this than by anything else her eccentric mother does. Her aunt Ivy, long-estranged from her rebellious sister, finds this irresponsibility predictable but makes room for Pearl; Pearl, however, is wary of becoming too close to her new caretaker. Ivy has plenty of closeness elsewhere, with a romantic attachment on one hand and a maternal affection for neighbor boy named Moonpie (who is likely to need a home in the near future when his grandmother passes away) on the other. Pearl resents Moonpie's easy likability and place in Ivy's heart, convinced by her low priority in her mother's life that she's unlovable and that that unlovability is why Ivy won't make a permanent place for her. In fact, it's because Ivy has correctly anticipated Ruby's return for her daughter, and Pearl is whisked away from the stability of Ivy's home. The book effectively depicts Pearl's ambivalence, loving her mother but hoping to fit in at Ivy's, and her unfamiliarity with healthy human dynamics is sensitively evoked. Her lack of affect is realistic but narratively unsatisfying, since it leaves her flat and uninvolved; secondary characters Ivy and Moonpie are more effectively rendered and developed. Although O'Connor makes a brave choice in not following the fictional formula of fairy-tale endings for an abandoned child, some readers will be disappointed that Ivy does not intervene more forcefully on behalf of the helpless Pearl, and they'll want more than the breath of hope contained in the piece of paper with Ivy's phone number that Pearl clutches as she and her mother drive away. This is still a bracing departure from cliché, however, and some kids may enjoy this unconventional story of hard times that just get harder. KM

O'MALLEY, KEVIN *Humpty Dumpty EGG-SPLODES*; written and illus. by Kevin O'Malley. Walker, 2001 32p

Library ed. ISBN 0-8027-8757-6 \$16.85

Trade ed. ISBN 0-8027-8756-8 \$15.95

Ad Gr. 3-6

Mr. Hatchery has come to read to his son's middle-grade class for Read Across America Day, and the book he has chosen is, oddly enough, *The Nursery Rhymes of Mother Goose*. Once the teacher leaves the room, however, Mr. Hatchery departs from the text and relates the saga of a giant Humpty Dumpty, who seeks revenge on the nursery-rhyme folks who let him fall. Old King Cole may be merry but he's no match for Humpty, not even with the help of Jack (the Nimble); only when Mother Goose gets back from vacation is any effective action taken (she gets Humpty Dumpty a wig and he turns into an Elvis impersonator). O'Malley uses this tale within a tale as an excuse for bad puns, Marx Brothers-like exchanges, and slapstick silliness. While the humor sometimes falls flatter than Humpty himself, the nursery-rhyme dialogue is effectively integrated into the narrative whole. Dialogue balloons give various Mother Goose-Landians an opportunity to speak their piece (or rhyme, as the case may be), and they add to the irreverent comic-strip nature of the book. O'Malley's drafting is less precise than usual and his faces lean toward the generic; Humpty Dumpty is still one scary ovoid (with teeth, yet), and

the gleefully grinning Mr. Hatchery sets the humorous tone. This would make a challenging read-aloud for a single reader, but it would work great as a choral reading or story theater for middle graders who know the rhymes and can appreciate the result of O'Malley's lunatic morphing. JMD

PEARSON, MARY E. *Scribbler of Dreams*. Harcourt, 2001 [240p]

ISBN 0-15-202320-8 \$17.00

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 7-12

Kait Malone and her family define themselves by what—and who—they are not: Crutchfields. Though the Crutchfields and the Malones are descended from sisters, Twin Oaks is not big enough to hold the two families, who have despised one another since their common ancestors became estranged. The fact that Kait's father is finishing a jail term for manslaughter after the accidental killing of a contemporary Crutchfield has exacerbated tensions to the point that Kait and her sister use their mother's maiden name when they register at Twin Oaks High School. There, bitter seventeen-year-old Kait meets an artistic boy named Bram and falls in love with him before he tells her something the reader has long since figured out: he's a Crutchfield, and it's his father who was killed. As Kait, still incognito, gets to know Bram's family and learns more about their shared history (easily locating in an ancestress' journal the secret explanation for the original family divide), she learns to forgive. However, Kait still has to deal with a Crutchfield plot to make her family sell prime farmland, as well as the complications directly connected to her masquerade, which, after a dramatic denouncement scene, leads to the loss of Bram's trust (for a time) and a short gothic meltdown for Kait ("I only vaguely remembered climbing onto my rock in the blackness of the pouring night"). She finally pulls herself together, taking the floor at a high-school assembly to give an impassioned speech in which she argues that people shouldn't let the past shape their future, and teen love finally conquers all. Though few will be surprised by the trajectory of this melodrama, readers with a taste for first-person angst and a compensating desire for fairy-tale endings (well-to-do Bram is the "king" of the school, after all) may enjoy the ride. FK

RASCHKA, CHRIS *Waffle*; written and illus. by Chris Raschka. Jackson/Atheneum, 2001 32p

ISBN 0-689-83838-7 \$16.00

Ad 5-8 yrs

While Wemberly alliteratively worried (BCCB 9/00), Waffle, as his name suggests, waffles. He shilly-shallies in a multitude of *w* ways—he wiggles, he wonders what if, he wishes that he would, he wobbles, and he is generally in a pretty pickle. Finally a chorus of his own name shows him the way when *w*, *a*, *f*, *f*, *l*, and *e* cavort together repeatedly and allow "flew" to come together from "waffle"; Waffle then takes off, flying "still a little fearfully" but having "worked a wonder (within)." There's no shortage of young Waffles in the primary grades of this world, so plenty of youngsters will identify with the protagonist's uncertainty, and the playfully sonorous text will make a satisfying read-aloud mouthful ("Waffle waffled. He felt awful. He was a waffler and wafflers waffle"). Unfortunately, the typographic impetus for his alteration will be hard to convey to listening youngsters, and the story's abstract approach may leave some kids behind. Plenty of them will appreciate the soundplay riffs, however, and they'll be happy to join in on the waffles.

Waffle is, appropriately enough, a big indistinct smear of peachy pigment, delineated by a scrawled topknot, uncertain eyes, and a few other sharp inky features (not to mention a fetching pair of red-checked trousers). He floats around the strong-colored backgrounds opposite smiling, Pac-Manesque faces in various arrays; when Waffle finally takes flight, the faces look on in serious wonder. While some viewers will yearn for Wemberly's concreteness, this has an eccentric charm to its didacticism that will appeal to youthful fancy. DS

ROOS, STEPHEN *The Gypsies Never Came*. Simon, 2001 116p
ISBN 0-689-83147-1 \$15.00

Ad Gr. 4-6

Sixth-grader Augie is working behind the counter of the dry-cleaners when Lydie Rose Meisenheimer comes in. The first thing he notices about her are her clothes (odd); the second thing he notices is his watch (gone). Lydie returns his watch, laughing at his indignation, and tells him it's "just something an old Gypsy taught me." She turns up as a new student in his sixth-grade class and proceeds to pester him with her attention and her insight. Her attention is focused on that which Augie would prefer remained unnoticed—his misshapen hand, deliberately hidden with a glove. Augie's dilemma has little to do with Lydie Rose or her barely believable life; it has everything to do with Augie's hand keeping him from joining the baseball team, his father leaving when Augie was a baby, and the rightfully (if brutally) vengeful brothers of a classmate wronged by Augie in a vote-buying scandal. Lydie Rose tells Augie stories about the Gypsies coming in their wagons and recognizing Augie for the unique individual he is because of, not despite, his hand. She makes Augie see his hand through her eyes, and, dreaming of a gypsy father figure, he burns his glove in a dream fire and wakes transformed. The plot is slim and the characterizations are often flat, but Roos has moments of deep clarity when he shows the reader the humanity, even the poetry, of his characters. Augie's extreme emotions—his deep hurt at his exclusion from a birthday party because he isn't on the baseball team; his anger at a disappointing potential father figure—ring with honesty. Readers will root for Augie when he rises to the challenge of accepting himself. JMD

RYLANT, CYNTHIA *Little Whistle*; illus. by Tim Bowers. Harcourt, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-15-201087-4 \$14.00

Ad 3-6 yrs

Little Whistle lives a comfortable life in Toytown, "the sweetest and kindest place in the world for a small guinea pig to live." He sleeps all day in his comfortable cage at the toy store, and, after hours, he explores the closed shop ("The store was quite large, so some nights Little Whistle took the train from one end to the other. And some nights he just walked") and visits with his many toy friends. Oil paintings feature a personable little rodent with melting eyes and a sincere expression, and his talking toy companions are just as sentimentally portrayed. The magic of a toy shop where the toys come alive at night is hard to resist, however, despite Little Whistle's overwhelmingly benevolent and preachy adventures. This first volume in a new series is deliberately wholesome, winsome, and wise, a children's story both quasi-instructional and benign, nearly Victorian in its stuffy self-awareness. The awkward stiffness of the figures suits their non-organic status and makes their perky awkwardness easier to accept. There is no conflict and little action to involve readers or listeners; nevertheless, this may be just the ticket for those adults looking for the cute and the safe. JMD

SANDLER, MARTIN W. *Vaqueros: America's First Cowmen*. Holt, 2001 117p illus. with photographs
ISBN 0-8050-6019-7 \$17.95 Ad Gr. 5-9

Though a crucial part of the Old West, the vaqueros haven't had the pull the cowboys have had on the American imagination; in fact, these Mexican and Mexican-origin horsemen, who largely influenced the cowboys, have had their reputations tarnished and denigrated over the years. Sandler sets out to change that in this compact overview of the vaqueros (whose name was the origin of the word "buckaroo") that examines their origins, their influence on the cowboys, their daily life, their skills, some vaquero legends, and the fate of the vaquero in popular culture. Unfortunately, the writing style is drier than the book's interesting subject merits; Sandler also overstates his case at some points (the metaphorical use of the verb "to spur" considerably predates the vaqueros) and misses some useful tidbits (he explains the *dar la vuelta*, the winding of a rope around the saddle horn, but never mentions its English mutation, the dally). The collection of information is still unusual, however, and the book's address of the cultural obscurity of the vaquero is downright fascinating. The multitude of black-and-white images, mostly old photographs or artwork from part of the era under the discussion, is impressive; while it's too bad color reproductions weren't included, the images evince both breadth and detail, creating an effective conglomerate picture of the vaquero and his (though Sandler emphasizes inclusivity, it's definitely all-male inclusivity) image. Sidebar features tend to distract from the flow of the text, but they and the subheaded sections make the book nonthreatening and browsable. Source notes, a glossary, a list for further reading, and an index are included. DS

SAYRE, APRIL PULLEY *Dig Wait Listen: A Desert Toad's Tale*; illus. by Barbara Bash. Greenwillow, 2001 32p
Library ed. ISBN 0-688-16615-6 \$15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-688-16614-8 \$15.95 R 3-6 yrs

Sayre dramatizes a year in the life of a spadefoot toad, which spends most of the year underground to survive the harsh desert climate, waiting for the rains that will allow it a few short days to reproduce before burrowing back down into the cool earth. While waiting, the toad protagonist hears other desert dwelling creatures hopping, crawling, and slithering across the sands above as it listens for the onomatopoeically described sounds and rhythms of falling rain ("Plop thunk, plop thunk, plop thunk gusssshhhhhhh!"). Bash's watercolor illustrations capture the detailed scales and markings of desert animals and plants against a backdrop of sweeping desert landscapes as well as up close. Although adults may need to intervene to help young listeners understand the science behind the story (described in smaller text on the last few pages of the book), audience members will enjoy meeting each of the unusual desert animals as they wait for the rain to fall. KM

SCIESZKA, JON *Baloney (Henry P.)*; illus. by Lane Smith. Viking, 2001 34p
ISBN 0-670-82948-3 \$15.99 R Gr. 2-4

Teachers never believe perfectly good reasons for tardiness, and Henry P. Baloney's Miss Bugscuttle is no exception. Little green Henry earnestly details how it all starts with his misplaced pencil, and the ensuing drama sends him in a rocket ship to a distant planet, where he almost becomes the inhabitants' dinner but ends up being shipped back on a school-destroying mission; he then finds himself plum-

meting towards his home planet at a Henry-smashing rate. No fears about excess substance here, but youngsters will snork appreciatively at cartoon-concept touches (Henry saves himself from smithereens by recalling he hasn't yet learned the law of gravity, so he can't obey it; he aborts the mission of destruction by using his pencil to erase it). The souped-up alien vocabulary adds another layer of amusement; Scieszka borrows words from all over (the "Decoder" glossary cites well over a dozen languages), creating an alien vocabulary that kids will enjoy puzzling out, and he tosses in a homegrown variation or two (the "sighing flosser" will be particularly well received). The Sputnik-hip type weaves through the art like comic-book text, its slanting white capitals (alien words in yellow) standing out against black backgrounds. The alien universe is a bit airier than Smith's usual dark, edgy milieu, and strong geometric shapes give a certain gravity to the proceedings; Henry P. himself, with his shiny black eyes, is so evocative of retro animation that he occasionally borders on the staid. There's still plenty of conglomerate weirdness in the visuals, however, and the combination of far-out tale and groaningly corny ending (Henry P. can't write it all down because he can't find his pencil) will endear this to its audience. DS

SEWALL, MARCIA *James Towne: Struggle for Survival*; written and illus. by Marcia Sewall. Atheneum, 2001 40p
ISBN 0-689-81814-9 \$16.00 R Gr. 4-6

Few writers can match Sewall in condensing the gritty challenges of American colonization into powerful yet gracefully written picture book format, and here she again ably conveys just how tenuous a foothold early settlers had in the New World. A fictional carpenter recounts the voyage and first years of settlement, when famine, fire, and sickness claimed a majority of colonists; Indians could be saviors, trading partners, or vicious foes; and pampered gentlemen in search of gold received bitter lessons on the necessity of laboring to survive. The narrator employs the understated, almost dispassionate style of his contemporaries: "While [Captain Newport] was away, and our guns packed in fat to keep them from rusting in this humid air, a host of Indians overcame us. A boy was killed, and most of the council injured. . . . Hastily we cut and shaped trees into a palisade to surround our settlement. With God's merciful assistance, the task was done." At the close of each segment of text Sewall includes a quote from the writings of actual Jamestown settlers; these function as footnotes authenticating the observations in the fictionalized memoir. Abundant illustrations in shaggy sepia lines and watercolor fill exhibit a rugged, earthy grace as they capture the vulnerability of the tiny community in an alien environment. A list of characters and a glossary are appended. EB

SÍS, PETER *Ballerina*; written and illus. by Peter Sís. Greenwillow, 2001 26p
ISBN 0-688-17944-4 \$14.95 Ad 4-6 yrs

The balletomane protagonist, Terry, is a ballerina—at least in her dreams. Dance dress-up turns her into a multitude of stars: her pink tutu puts her in *The Nutcracker*, her white feather boa places her in *Swan Lake*, her violet cape invites her into *Cinderella*. Finally she puts on a rainbow of colored scarves and becomes the best ballerina of all, much to the approbation of her adoring familial audience. This doesn't have the effective contrast between solid realism and panoramic dreams that Sís' similarly styled books about Matt have had (such as *Fire Truck*, 11/99);

the narrative here is less imaginative, presenting essentially a pleasing list. The spreads are attractive, with a thickly drawn child Terry on one side and an ethereal ballerina Terry in a detailed scene opposite, but the foldout doesn't earn its keep, being merely a long illustration that could have been compressed into a single spread. The fantasy touches and the ballet showcase (since not all are named in the text, there's an additional name-the-ballet game) are alluring, however, and this may be just the thing to keep wannabe Giselles on their toes. DS

STREET, MICHAEL *Lucky 13: Solitaire Games for Kids*; illus. by Alan Tiegreen. SeaStar, 2001 128p

Trade ed. ISBN 1-58717-013-2 \$14.95

Paper ed. ISBN 1-58717-014-0 \$6.95

R Gr. 4-8

Street has compiled an amusing assortment of card games for loners of all ages (kids should not be allowed the monopoly implied by the subtitle), with a careful introduction to terminology (builds, layouts, stockpiles, and wastepiles) and generally clear instructions (with strategy tips) on several dozen games, arranged according to learning difficulty. He cautions, "Remember that just because a game is easy to play, it doesn't mean it's easy to win!" Players will soon discover, after attempting a few selections, a happy medium of instructional clarity and strategic challenge suited to their own abilities. Tiegreen's card-characters dash through the pages and provide some visual variety to the all-white human cast, though befathered cards sending smoke-signal strategies across the Grand Canyon are an unfortunate choice. The chipper little vignettes are largely pleasant window dressing, but the diagrams are beautifully designed life savers that often explicate plays as well as layouts. When the day is rainy, friends aren't around, and "Klondike" is simply old hat, this is the place to turn. EB

SUEN, ANASTASIA *Air Show*; illus. by Cecco Mariniello. Holt, 2001 32p

ISBN 0-8050-4952-5 \$15.95

Ad 5-7 yrs

The airshow scenario and rhymed text ("Cougars howl/ Panthers prowl") are pretty much extraneous here; the real draw is full-page art featuring vintage aircraft in flight and accompanying spreads and insets displaying overhead, front, and side views in more precise detail. This is the stuff young plane spotters revel in, and browsers will thumb through for their favorites—from the 1916 Sopwith Camel to the 1980 McDonnell Douglas F-18 Hornet. Suen and Mariniello recognize that children take their plane books seriously, and although the swooping line and watercolor action scenes are often at visual odds with the static, angular diagram boxes, the inclusion of dates and dimensions will be much appreciated. A list of "famous firsts in flight" tops off the presentation, and kids will probably wear these pages thin before they move on to more challenging text; this would also make an absorbing storytime entry for youngsters with a mechanical bent. EB

TAYLOR, KIM *Cissy Funk*. HarperCollins, 2001 [224p]

Library ed. ISBN 0-06-029042-0 \$15.89

Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-029041-2 \$15.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad Gr. 6-9

Thirteen-year-old Cissy would be content in her tiny, sun-blistered Colorado town if only her father would return and Ma would snap out of the profound depression and erratic behaviors she has exhibited since the death of baby Violet. Aunt Vera—

twenty-eight, stylish, and worldly-wise—blows into town like a breath of fresh air and takes Cissy in hand as loving mentor and much-needed protector during Ma's abusive rages. When Vera fully realizes how impossible life has become for Cissy, she whisks her off to Denver; but tenuous employment and dark family secrets make establishing a home together all but impossible. Vera is forced to send Cissy back, leaving the girl even more confused and embittered than ever. Taylor drops ample clues throughout her tale to solve all the "secrets and lies around here," and readers should figure out long before Cissy does that Vera is really her mother—who happily reclaims her in the end. Vera's lesbianism doesn't come as much of a surprise, either, although Cissy's easy acceptance (in a three-line paragraph) is a bit of a stretch, and a conclusion that finds Cissy, Vera, and Vera's lover living together happily ever after in Depression-era Los Angeles (all resolved in a final handful of pages) is even harder to swallow. Cissy is a thoroughly sympathetic heroine, though, and Vera is touching and credible in her earnest but sometimes fumbling attempts at motherhood; readers can only wish them the happiness Taylor improbably promises. EB

WIESNER, DAVID, ad. *The Three Pigs*; ad. and illus. by David Wiesner. Clarion, 2001 [40p]

ISBN 618-00701-6 \$16.00

Reviewed from galleys

R Gr. 2-3

You know it's not going to be just building materials and wolf exhalations when David Wiesner does the famous pig trio, and indeed it's not. Things seem to go according to plan until the wolf huffs at the first little pig and blows him right out of the story; the oblivious text drones on, but the disappointed wolf looks in puzzlement at the pig-free ruins. The second pig flees the story prior to consumption too, and the first two pigs meet up with the third pig and go on a bookish adventure. First they turn a page into a paper airplane and fly through white space, and then they gambol through a library of picture books, finally fetching a dragon from a knightly coloring-book tale and bringing him back to give the poor wolf the surprise of his life. This isn't the most innovative or tightly conceived metatextual folktale (Scieszka and Smith's *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by A. Wolf, BCCB 9/89, still tops the porcine list), but it's an amusing one nonetheless. The text is pretty much the poker-faced straight man here, with the art pulling the weight of the jokes. Wiesner uses style to great effect: initially, the wolf-and-pig drama unfolds in subdued, translucent watercolor with solid, simplified, literal lines; the pigs become fuzzy and beady-eyed mischief-makers when they exit their story, and they change character as they wander the books, most notably turning candy-sweet in the bland adorableness of the nursery-rhyme scene. Imaginative compositions include not only the airborne pigs in white space but one oinker hogging the page and sticking his nose out at the reader, saying, "I think someone's out there." This has the advantage over many postmodern reworkings of making a very light reading demand, so kids whose artistic sense is more sophisticated than their verbal perception will appreciate their chance to be in on the joke. DS

WILHELM, DOUG *Raising the Shades*. Farrar, 2001 181p

ISBN 0-374-36178-9 \$16.00

Ad Gr. 5-7

Casey Butterfield doesn't hang out like other seventh-grade boys; he knows it's important to be home when his dad gets there, or else he could be in major-league

trouble if it's one of his dad's drinking days. He's gotten used to taking care of his father, but he misses hanging out with his best friend, Oscar, and he resents his mother for taking off and leaving him in this position. He's nonetheless uncertain when his aunt begins to plan an intervention, because he's afraid that such a tactic will destroy what little relationship he has left with his father. Wilhelm capably depicts both Casey's anguish and his fear of change lest it result in something worse; he's a believable kid and Oscar is a lively and amusing friend. There's a programmatic side to the narrative, however, with a lot of explanations about alcoholism, familial impact, and the blamelessness of the children; prescription turns to melodrama in a friend's tale of her mother's death from substance abuse and in the book's tendency to paint Dad's smoking pot in the garage as an unspeakable horror. This has more youthful accessibility than many such treatments of the problem, however, and the harsh picture may be an eyeopener for kids in a similar predicament as well as those out of it. DS

WILLARD, NANCY *The Moon & Riddles Diner and the Sunnyside Café*; illus. by Chris Butler. Harcourt, 2001 [40p]

ISBN 0-15-201941-3 \$17.00

Reviewed from galleys

R 5-8 yrs

In a series of rhyming poems, Willard creates a loosely sketched world of fanciful adventures, as Shoofly Sally rambles along in her search for the titular diner and café. Initially written from Sally's perspective, the poems later employ the perspectives of various creatures and objects that she meets in her travels, and the lyrical rhythms of the poetry echo the nonsense of nursery rhymes. Willard occasionally refers to traditional rhymes and stories, as when cows are shown "Dancing All Night" far above the proverbial moon or when a boy who turns into a golden spoon enjoys hearing his mother recite the lines "and the dish ran away with the spoon." The longest poem, "The Ballad of the Riddling Ghost and the Chuggamonga Frog," borrows from folklore motifs when a frog survives a lengthy battle by enlisting all her frog compatriots to spell her one after the other, appearing to be a single frog of great endurance. Butler's cut-paper illustrations frame the poems with textured paper collage techniques that are reminiscent of Wisniewski's work; they're somewhat overbusy, but they're interestingly dimensional from a distance, and they occasionally include holes in the collages that are then backlit, creating objects that glow with light. Although the poems are cleverly connected to create a more impressive effect together than apart, they are also lengthy enough, taken as a whole, that younger listeners may not make it through the volume in one sitting. Nevertheless, children who enjoy Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* and other fanciful adventures will happily dine on this lyrical treat. Willard includes recipes for foods from the Moon & Riddles Diner and the Sunnyside Café at the end of the book. KM

WOLFE, FRANCES *Where I Live*; written and illus. by Frances Wolfe. Tundra, 2001 [32p]

ISBN 0-88776-529-7 \$14.95

Reviewed from galleys

Ad 3-6 yrs

The answer to the implicit question of where exactly the young female narrator lives ("the SEASIDE") is spelled out by the initial letter of each unrhymed couplet, and by more overt visual clues in the double-page spreads that offer readers an up-

close and personal view of the treasures and pleasures to be found there. Strikingly larger than life images predominate (binoculars with 7" diameter lenses, an enormous child's hand holding a seashell), their stability, along with the consistency of the layout, mitigating the effects of a dizzying variety of perspectives. The simple, rhythmic text sometimes falls into cliché ("Sunbeams sparkle like diamonds on the water"), and the oil on masonite illustrations render objects too literally (the "hidden figures" in the clouds are readily visible) and human figures too statically (the narrator's face—seen only sporadically—is almost doll-like). Despite the sentimental photorealism, the arresting natural scenes—rendered in clear blues, golds, and greens—may draw viewers. An accessible model for imitation, this title could enliven thematic units on seasons or regions. FK

WOLFF, VIRGINIA EUWER *True Believer*. Atheneum, 2001 264p
ISBN 0-689-82827-6 \$17.00 R* Gr. 7-12

See this month's Big Picture, p. 329, for review.

WOODSON, JACQUELINE *Sweet, Sweet Memory*; illus. by Floyd Cooper. Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, 2001 32p
ISBN 0-7868-0241-3 \$14.99 R 5-10 yrs

Sarah's gardener grandfather has just passed on, but Sarah hasn't forgotten him or what he told her: "'Like us,' Grandpa said, holding the rich brown earth in his hand, 'a part of it never dies. Everything and everyone goes on and on.'" Sarah herself tells the story of her grandfather's wake, softly relating the events of the day while she quietly struggles with her own grief. Safe in a circle of loving friends and relatives, Sarah listens to stories about her beloved grandpa. Asked to tell a story about him herself, Sarah leans into her grandmother and cries instead. "'It'll pass,' Uncle Mitchell says. . . . 'A little bit at a time. Everything and everyone goes on and on.' 'That's my story,'" Sarah whispers, and she learns that it was Grandpa's story, too, and he told it to everyone. Woodson manages to convey, in a brief text of well-chosen words, the passage of time and the amelioration of heartfelt grief. The nostalgic golden glow of Cooper's pastels is held in check here with touches of deep blue, red, and violet, and highlights of white—Sarah's white dress, a woman's shawl, Uncle's white shirt—that spark off the pages. Again Woodson shows that it's possible to distill a complex topic into thirty-two pages without missing a thing. JMD

YOLEN, JANE *Odysseus in the Serpent Maze*; by Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris. HarperCollins, 2001 [256p]
Library ed. ISBN 0-06-028735-7 \$15.89
Trade ed. ISBN 0-06-028734-9 \$15.95
Reviewed from galleys Ad Gr. 4-7

Odysseus, Greek hero and storyteller, is given a lively adolescence in this first title in the "Young Heroes" fantasy series. Thirteen-year-old Odysseus and his loyal friend, Mentor, hunt for wild boar, survive a shipwreck, rescue Odysseus' future wife, Penelope, and her well-known cousin Helen (soon to be of Troy) from pirates, and, with the help of satyr Silenius, escape Daedalus' Labyrinth and defeat the multi-headed serpent, Ladon. Phew! The action is fast and furious, and if the dialogue has the ring of the modern-day schoolyard, middle-graders won't stop reading long enough to quibble. Obvious characterizations (Odysseus is brash

and brave, Mentor is loyal and cautious, Penelope is patient and sensible, Helen is spoiled and self-absorbed) and occasional clumsy exposition distract somewhat from the action, but there is humor aplenty to keep the pages turning. Readers with some background in Greek mythology will appreciate the foreshadowing of coming events, but that knowledge isn't necessary to get carried along by the break-neck pace. A concluding note entitled "What Is True About This Story" provides information about ancient Greece and Greek mythology. JMD

ZAUNDERS, BO *Feathers, Flaps, & Flops: Fabulous Early Fliers*; illus. by Roxie Munro. Dutton, 2001 48p
ISBN 0-525-46466-2 \$17.99

R Gr. 4-7

Seven headliners (men and women) from the field of aviation are featured here, tracing the history of early flight from the brilliant inventiveness of the eighteenth century Montgolfier Brothers to the brazen blarney of "Wrong Way" Corrigan in the 1930s, with the derring-do of Bessie Coleman, Jimmy Doolittle, and their aeronautic kin in between. Zaunders is a marvelous storyteller with a keen eye for detail ("Minutes later [the balloonists] were nearly skewered on a church tower. . . . On landing, Pilatre's coat caught fire. Fortunately, he wasn't wearing it"), and readers who enjoy the gossipy biographical style of Kathleen Krull's popular *Lives of*. . . series will welcome the similar blend of breezy tone and solid information. Munro's line and watercolor pictures tend to be a bit splashy, but since so many early flights culminated in a "splash," perhaps that's to be expected. This is bound to be an engaging cover-to-cover solo read, but science and social-studies teachers will want to consider incorporating a sketch or two into lessons as well; kids'll be staring off into space, and for once that will be a good thing. EB



PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS: RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

Ellis, Sarah. *From Reader to Writer: Teaching Writing through Classic Children's Books*. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 2000. ISBN 0-88899-372-2; \$24.95. 176p.

Books about writing often lean towards the abstract and airy-fairy or, especially when geared toward young people, the dully didactic. Ellis writes with the voice and knowledge of a reader as well as a writer and the experience of a librarian, and her book-centered approach to writing is both logical and inviting. Following a spirited introduction, sixteen chapters deal with sixteen creators of children's literature (though there's a Canadian slant, most of the subjects are available in U.S. libraries as well). Each chapter includes a bit of background, usually incorporating a youthful biographical anecdote, information on the author's early reading, a focus on a particular title, some classroom ideas, and a short annotated bibliography of books with a thematic connection. The book is shrewd and inventive about classroom possibilities (pointing out the scene in Travers' *Mary Poppins* that doesn't appear in the movie and therefore doesn't immediately recall Julie Andrews, for instance), and it's particularly good at idea-prompting questions, which pepper just about every chapter; random tidbits ranging from practical to informational are interpolated in smaller print and set off with an apple symbol. Ellis displays as much skill and wit in her encouragement of writing as in her writing itself; that's a rare and welcome combination. This will appeal to budding young writers as well as inspiring classroom activity. DS

Zipes, Jack. *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*. Routledge, 2001. ISBN 0-415-92811-7; \$24.95. 213p.

Nine essays (seven based on talks given by Zipes between 1996-2000) address topics in children's literature from a political and sociological standpoint. Zipes begins by taking aim at corporations (including publishing conglomerates) that are preoccupied with profit, viewing children as nothing more than a potentially lucrative consumer group. Additional essays consider matters such as the place of children's literature in academia, storytelling and its revival in the United States, and the Harry Potter phenomenon. Zipes seems to view children's literature as monolithic, and he's inclined toward sweeping generalizations ("Children's books are formulaic and banal, distinguishable from one another only by their brand labels"); the book is also marred by easily avoidable errors in names ("Newberry" for Newbery, "Greenway" for Greenaway, "Mazier" for Mazer, for example). Nonetheless, his passion for his topic is clear, and though his theories may exasperate those practitioners who use children's literature with actual children on a daily basis, his essays spotlight complex issues that deserve wide consideration. An extensive bibliography and detailed index are included. JMD

SUBJECT AND USE INDEX

Keyed to *The Bulletin's* alphabetical arrangement by author, this index, which appears in each issue, can be used in three ways. Entries in regular type refer to subjects; entries in **bold type** refer to curricular or other uses; entries in ALL-CAPS refer to genres and appeals. In the case of subject headings, the subhead "stories" refers to books for the readaloud audience; "fiction," to those books intended for independent reading.

Adoption-fiction: Little
 Africa-folklore: MacDonald
 African Americans: Fradin; Lester
 The Blues
 African Americans-stories:
 Woodson
 Airplanes: Suen; Zaunders
 Alcoholism-fiction: Wilhelm
 Aliens-fiction: Scieszka
 Aliens-stories: Graves
 American Indians-fiction: Matthaei;
 Mikaelsen
 Animals: Ashman; Boynton
 Animals-stories: Finn; MacDonald;
 Masurel
 Antisemitism-fiction: Matas
 Aunts-fiction: Avi *Prairie*;
 O'Connor
 Aviation: Suen; Zaunders
 Ballet-stories: SIs
 Beaches-stories: Wolfe, F.
 BEDTIME STORIES: Chorao
 BIOGRAPHIES: Fradin; Lester *The*
 Blues; MacLeod;
 Brothers and sisters-fiction: Lester
 When; Little
 Camping-poetry: George
 Camping-stories: London *White*
 Cards: Street
 Cats-stories: MacDonald
 Civil War-fiction: Matas
 Civil War-stories: Lewin
 Clothes-stories: Crunk
 CONCEPT BOOKS: *How Many*;
 Letters
 Cousins-fiction: Fleischman
 Cowboys: Sandler

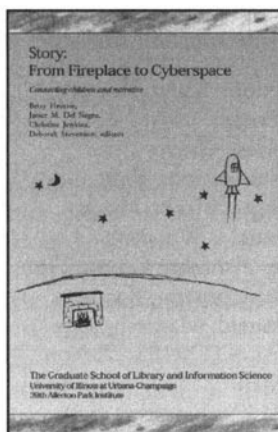
Crime and criminals-fiction:
 Chambers; Fleischman; Karr;
 Kehret; Lester *When*; Mikaelsen
 Dancers and dancing-stories: SIs
 Dating-fiction: Naylor
 Death and dying-fiction: Kehret
 Death and dying-stories: Woodson
 Depression, the-fiction: Taylor
 Deserts: Sayre
 Dinosaurs-stories: Kastner
 Disabilities-fiction: Avi *Prairie*
 Drug abuse-fiction: Fletcher
 EPISTOLARY FICTION:
 Armstrong
 Ethics and values: Matas;
 Mikaelsen; Roos; Wolfe, V.
 Explorers and exploring-fiction:
 Armstrong
 Families-fiction: Fleischman;
 Fletcher; Haddix; Pearson
 FANTASY: DeVita; Elliott; Nix;
 Yolen
 Fathers and sons-fiction: Fletcher;
 Wilhelm
 Fathers and sons-stories: London
 White
 Fathers-stories: Browne
 Fears-stories: Chorao
 Feuds-fiction: Fleischman; Pearson
 Fish-fiction: DeVita
 Flying-stories: Raschka
 FOLK AND FAIRY TALES:
 Grimm; Huck; MacDonald;
 Wiesner
 Food and eating-fiction: Elliott
 Friendship-fiction: Chambers;
 Naylor; Roos

Friendship—stories: Masurel
FUNNY STORIES: Crunk; DeVita
 Games: Street
 Graduation: Boynton
 Grandfathers—stories: Crunk;
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 Guinea pigs—stories: Rylant
 Heroes—fiction: Yolen
HISTORICAL FICTION:
 Armstrong; Avi *Don't*; Karr;
 Matas; Matthaei; Taylor
History, U.S.: Fradin; Lester *The*
 Blues; Lewin; Matthaei; Sandler;
 Sewall
History, world: MacLeod;
 Matthaei; Zaunders
 Homosexuality—fiction: Taylor;
 Wolff
 Houses: Ashman
 Insects—fiction: Elliott
 Jews—fiction: Matas
Language arts: George; Scieszka
 Latinos—fiction: Chambers
LOVE STORIES: Pearson
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 Monsters—stories: Chorao
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 Parents—stories: Chorao
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 Pigs—fiction: Wiesner
POETRY: George; London *Park*;
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 Racism—fiction: Matas

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 School—fiction: Avi *Don't*; Haddix;
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 Scotland—folklore: Huck
 Seasons—poetry: London *Park*
 Self-confidence—stories: Raschka
 Shadow puppets—stories: Chorao
 Sisters—fiction: Kurtz; Pearson
 Slavery: Fradin
 Space—stories: Graves
 Spiritualism—fiction: Karr
Storytelling: Grimm; Huck;
 MacDonald; Woodson
Storytime: Ashman; Crunk; Finn;
 Grimm; Johnston; Kastner;
 MacDonald; Masurel; Sayre
SURVIVAL STORIES: Kehret;
 Mikaelsen
TALL TALES: Scieszka
 Teddy bears—stories: Johnston
 Toads: Sayre
 Toys—stories: Johnston; Kastner;
 Rylant
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 London *White*
 West, the: Sandler
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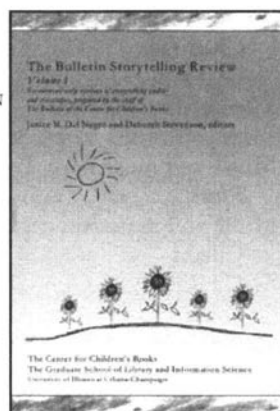
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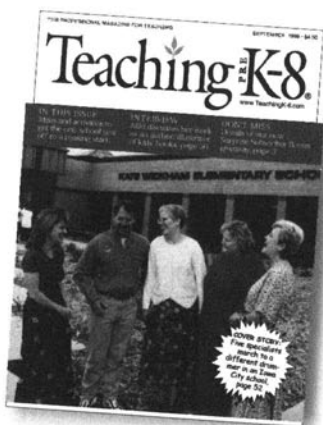
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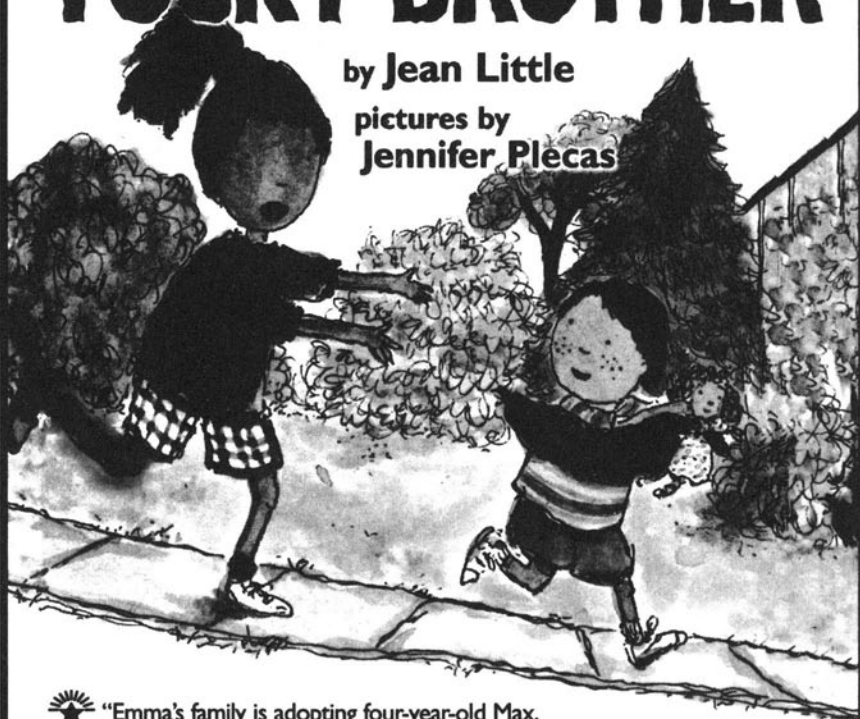
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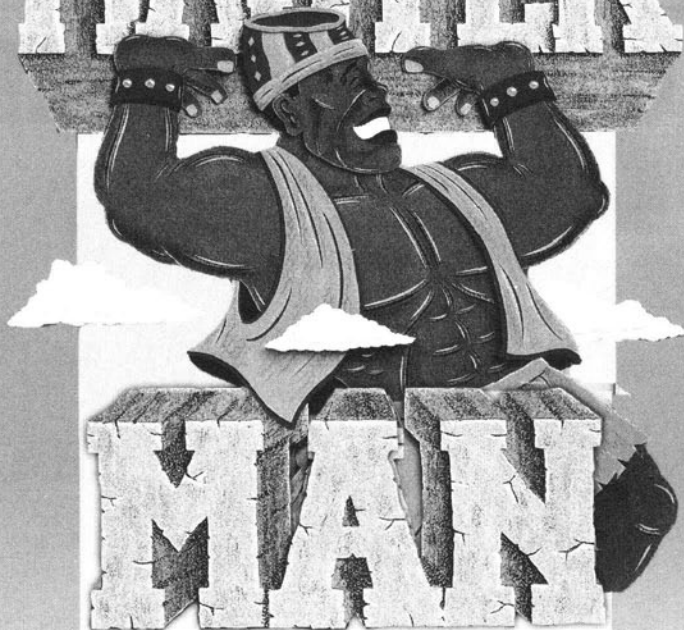
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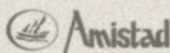
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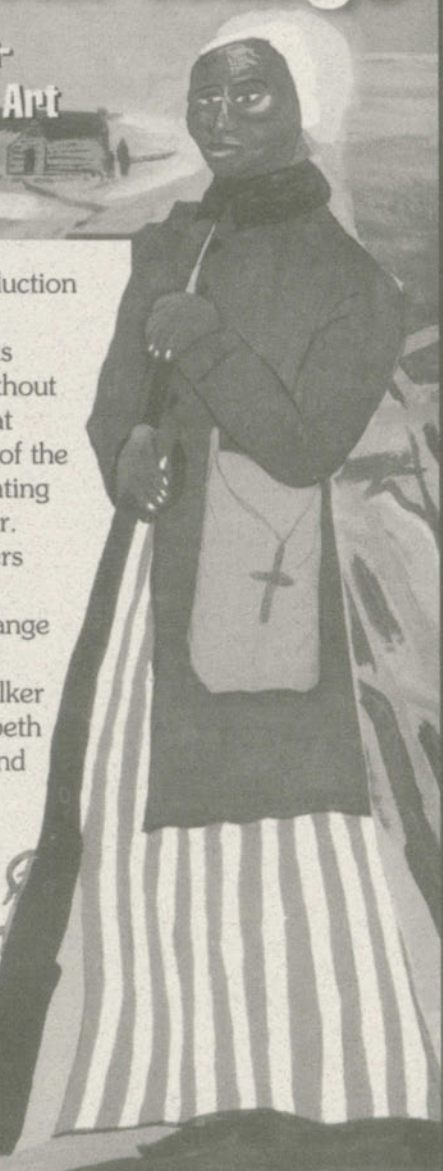
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